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FROM THE HOUSETOPS

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FROM THE HOUSETOPS

BY

GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

AUTHOR OF "GRAUSTARK," "THE HOLLOW OF HER HAND," "THE PRINCE OF GRAUSTARK," ETC.

With Illustrations by

F. GRAHAM COOTES

M. A. DONOHUE & COMPANY

CHICAGO NEW YORK

63149A

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FROM THE HOUSETOPS

CHAPTER I

MR. TEMPLETON THORPE was soon to be married for the second time. Back in 1860 he married a girl of twenty-two, and now in the year 1912 he was taking unto himself another girl of twenty-two. In the interim he had achieved a grandson whose years were twenty-nine. In his seventy-seventh year he was worth a great many millions of dollars, and for that and no other reason perhaps, one of the newspapers, in commenting on the approaching nuptials, declared that nobody could now deny that he was a philanthropist.

"I daresay you are right, Mrs. Tresslyn," said old Templeton Thorpe's grandson, bitterly. "He hasn't many more years to live."

The woman in the chair started, her eyes narrowing. The flush deepened in her cheeks. It had been faint before and steady, but now it was ominous.

"I fear you are again putting words into my mouth," she said coldly. "Have I made any such statement?"

"I did not say that you had, Mrs. Tresslyn," said the young man. "I merely observed that you were right. It isn't necessary to put the perfectly obvious into words. He is a very old man, so you are right in believing that he hasn't many years left to live. Nearly four times the age of Anne,— that's how old he is,— and time flies very swiftly for him."

"I must again remind you that you are in danger of becoming offensive, Braden. Be good enough to remember that this interview is not of my choosing. I consented to receive you in —"

"You knew it was inevitable — this interview, as you call it. You knew I would come here to denounce this detestable transaction. I have nothing to apologise for, Mrs. Tresslyn. This is not the time for apologies. You may order me to leave your house, but I don't believe you will find any satisfaction in doing so. You would still know that I have a right to protect a senile old man against the —"

"Your grandfather is the last man in the world to be described as senile," she broke in, with a thin smile.

"I could have agreed with you a month ago, but not now," said he savagely.

"Perhaps you would better go now, Braden," said she, arising. She was a tall, handsome woman, well under fifty. As she faced her visitor, her cold, unfriendly eyes were almost on a level with his own. The look she gave him would have caused a less determined man to quail. It was her way of closing an argument, no matter whether it was with her butcher, her grocer, or the bishop himself. Such a look is best described as imperious, although one less reserved than I but perhaps more potently metaphorical would say that she simply looked a hole through you, seeing beyond you as if you were not there at all. She had found it especially efficacious in dealing with the butcher and even the bishop, to say nothing of the effect it always had upon the commonplace nobodies who go to the butcher and the *bishop* for the luxuries of both the present and the

future life, and it had seldom failed to wither and blight the most hardy of masculine opponents. It was not always so effective in crushing the members of her own sex, for there were women in New York society who could look straight through Mrs. Tresslyn without even appearing to suspect that she was in the range of vision. She had been known, however, to stare an English duke out of countenance, and it was a long time before she forgave herself for doing so. It would appear that it is not the proper thing to do. Crushing the possessor of a title is permissible only among taxi-drivers and gentlemen whose daughters are already married.

Her stony look did not go far toward intimidating young Mr. Thorpe. He was a rather sturdy, athletic looking fellow with a firm chin and a well-set jaw, and a pair of grey eyes that were not in the habit of wavering.

"I came here to see Anne," he said, a stubborn expression settling in his face. "Is she afraid to see me, or is she obeying orders from you, Mrs. Tresslyn?"

"She doesn't care to see you," said Mrs. Tresslyn. "That's all there is to be said about it, Braden."

"So far as I am concerned, she is still engaged to me. She hasn't broken it off by word or letter. If you don't mind, I'd like to have it broken off in the regular way. It doesn't seem quite proper for her to remain engaged to me right up to the instant she marries my grandfather. Or is it possible that she intends to remain bound to me during the lifetime of my grandparent, with the idea of holding me to my bargain when he is gone?"

"Don't be ridiculous," was all that Mrs. Tresslyn said in response to this sarcasm, but she said it scathingly.

For a full minute they stood looking into each

other's eyes, each appraising the other, one offensively, the other defensively. She had the advantage of him, for she was prepared to defend herself while he was in the position of one who attacks without strategy and leaps from one exposed spot to another. It was to her advantage that she knew that he despised her; it was to his disadvantage that he knew she had always liked him after a manner of her own, and doubtless liked him now despite the things he had said to her. She had liked him from his boyhood days when report had it that he was to be the sole heir to his grandfather's millions, and she had liked him, no doubt, quite as sincerely, after the old man had declared that he did not intend to ruin a brilliant career by leaving a lot of uninspiring money to his ambitious grandson.

In so many words, old Templeton Thorpe had said, not two months before, that he intended to leave practically all of his money to charity! All except the two millions he stood ready to settle upon his bride the day she married him! Possibly Mrs. Tresslyn liked the grandson all the more for the treasures that he had lost, or was about to lose. It is easy to like a man who will not be pitied. At any rate, she did not consider it worth while to despise him, now that he had only a profession to offer in exchange for her daughter's hand.

"Of course, Mrs. Tresslyn, I know that Anne loves me," he said, with forced calmness. "She doesn't love my grandfather. That isn't even debatable. I fear that I am the only person in the world who does love him. I suspect, too, that if he loves any one, I am that one. If you think that he is fool enough to believe that Anne loves him, you are vastly mistaken. He knows perfectly well that she doesn't, and, by gad,

he doesn't blame her. He understands. That's why he sits there at home and chuckles. I hope you will not mind my saying to you that he considers me a very lucky person."

"Lucky?" said she, momentarily off her guard.

"If you care to hear exactly how he puts it, he says I'm *damned* lucky, Mrs. Tresslyn. Of course, you are not to assume that I agree with him. If I thought all this was Anne's doing and not yours, I should say that I am lucky, but I can't believe — good heavens, I will not believe that she could do such a thing! A young, beautiful, happy girl voluntarily — oh, it is unspeakable! She is being driven into it, she is being sacrificed to —"

"Just one moment, Braden," interrupted Mrs. Tresslyn, curtly. "I may as well set you quite straight in the matter. It will save time and put an end to recriminations. My daughter does not care the snap of her fingers for Mr. Thorpe. I think she loves you quite as dearly now as she ever did. At any rate, she says she does. But that is neither here nor there. She is going to marry Mr. Thorpe, and of her own volition. I have advised her to do so, I will admit, but I have not driven her to it, as you say. No one but a fool would expect her to love that old man. He doesn't ask it of her. He simply asks her to marry him. Nowadays people do not always marry for love. In fact, they frequently marry to avoid it — at least for the time being. Your grandfather has told you of the marriage settlement. It is to be two million dollars, set apart for her, to be hers in full right on the day that he dies. We are far from rich, Anne and I. My husband was a failure — but you know our circumstances quite well enough without my going into

them. My daughter is her own mistress. She is twenty-three. She is able to choose for herself. It pleases her to choose the grandfather instead of the grandson. Is that perfectly plain to you? If it is, my boy, then I submit that there is nothing further to be said. The situation is surely clear enough for even you to see. We do not pretend to be doing anything noble. Mr. Thorpe is seventy-seven. That is the long and short of it."

"In plain English, it's the money you are after," said he, with a sneer.

"Obviously," said she, with the utmost candour. "Young women of twenty-three do not marry old men of seventy-seven for love. You may imagine a young girl marrying a penniless youth for love, but can you picture her marrying a penniless octogenarian for the same reason? I fancy not. I speak quite frankly to you, Braden, and without reserve. We have always been friends. It would be folly to attempt to delude you into believing that a sentimental motive is back of our — shall we say enterprise?"

"Yes, that is what I would call it," said he levelly. "It is a more refined word than scheme."

"The world will be grateful for the opportunity to bear me out in all that I have said to you," she went on. "It will cheerfully, even gleefully supply any of the little details I may have considered unnecessary or superfluous in describing the situation. You are at liberty, then, to go forth and assist in the castigation. You have my permission,— and Anne's, I may add,— to say to the world that I have told you plainly why this marriage is to take place. It is no secret. It isn't improbable that your grandfather will consent to back you up in your denunciation. He is that kind

of a man. He has no illusions. Permit me to remind you, therefore, that neither you nor the world is to take it for granted that we are hoodwinking Mr. Thorpe. Have I made myself quite clear to you, Braden?"

The young man drew a deep breath. His tense figure relaxed. "I did not know there were such women in the world as you, Mrs. Tresslyn. There were heartless, soulless women among the Borgias and the Medicis, but they lived in an age of intrigue. Their acts were mildly innocuous when compared with —"

"I must ask you to remember that you are in my home, Braden," she interrupted, her eyes ablaze.

"Oh, I remember where I am, perfectly," he cried. "It was in this very room that Anne promised to become my wife. It was here that you gave your consent, less than a year ago."

He had been pacing the floor, back and forth across the space in front of the fireplace, in which logs were blazing on this raw February afternoon. Now he stopped once more to face her resolutely.

"I insist that it is my right to see Anne," he said. His eyes were bloodshot, his cheek pallid. "I must hear from her own lips that she no longer considers herself bound to me by the promise made a year ago. I demand that much of her. She owes it to me, if not to herself, to put an end to the farce before she turns to tragedy. I don't believe she appreciates the wickedness of the thing she is about to do. I insist that it is my right to speak with her, to urge her to reconsider, to point out to her the horrors of —"

"She will not see you, Braden," broke in the mother, finality in her voice.

"She *must* see me," he shouted. "If not to-day, to-morrow; if not then, some other day, for, by the Eternal, Mrs. Tresslyn, I intend to speak with her if I have to wait until the accursed day you have selected, — at the very altar, if necessary. She shall not go into this thing until she has had the final word with me, and I with her. She does not know what she is doing. She is carried away by the thought of all that money — Money! Good God, Mrs. Tresslyn, she has told me a hundred times that she would marry me if I were as poor as the raggedest beggar in the streets. She loves me, she cannot play this vile trick on me. Her heart is pure. You cannot make me believe that she isn't honest and fair and loyal. I tell you now, once and for all, that I will not stand idly by and see this vile sacrifice made in order to —"

"Rawson," interrupted Mrs. Tresslyn, looking beyond him in the direction of the door, "Doctor Thorpe is going. Will you give him his hat and coat?" She had pressed a button beside the mantelpiece, and in response to the call, the butler stood in the doorway. "Good day, Braden. I am sorry that Anne is unable to see you to-day. She —"

"Good day, Mrs. Tresslyn," he choked out, controlling himself with an effort. "Will you tell her that I shall call to-morrow?"

She smiled. "When do you expect to return to London? I had hoped to have you stay until after the wedding."

His smile was more of an effort than hers. "Thanks. My grandfather has expressed the same hope. He says the affair will not be complete without my presence at the feast. To-morrow, at this hour, I shall come to see Anne. Thank you, Rawson."

CHAPTER II

HIS gaze swept the long, luxurious drawing-room, now filled with the shadows of late afternoon. A sigh that ended in an unvoiced imprecation escaped him. There was not an object in the room that did not possess for him a peculiar claim of intimacy. Here he had dreamed of paradise with Anne, and here he had built upon his hopes,— a staunch future that demanded little of the imagination. He could never forget this room and all that it had held for him.

But now, in that brief, swift glance, he found himself estimating the cost of all the treasures that it contained, and the price that was to be paid in order that they might not be threatened. These things represented greed. They had always represented greed. They had been saved out of the wreck that befell the Tresslyn fortunes when Anne was a young girl entering her teens, the wreck that destroyed Arthur Tresslyn and left his widow with barely enough to sustain herself and children through the years that intervened between the then and the now.

He recalled that after the wreck had been cleared up, Mrs. Tresslyn had a paltry twenty-five thousand a year on which to maintain the house that, fortuitously, had been in her name at the time of the smash. A paltry sum indeed! Barely enough to feed and clothe one hundred less exacting families for a year; families, however, with wheelbarrows instead of automobiles, and with children instead of servants.

Ten years had elapsed since the death of Arthur Tresslyn, and still the house in the east Seventies held

itself above water by means of that meagre two thousand a month! These rare, almost priceless objects upon which he now gazed had weathered the storm, proof against the temptations that beset an owner embarrassed by their richness; they had maintained a smug relationship to harmony in spite of the jangling of discordant instruments, such as writs and attachments and the wails of insufferable creditors who made the usual mistake of thinking that a man's home is his castle and therefore an object of reprisal. The splendid porcelains, the incomparable tapestries and the small but exquisite paintings remained where they had been placed by the amiable but futile Arthur, and all the king's men and all the king's horses could not have removed them without Mrs. Tresslyn's sanction. The mistress of the house subsisted as best she could on the pitiful income from a sequestered half-million, and lived in splendour among objects that deluded even the richest and most arrogant of her friends into believing that nothing was more remote from her understanding than the word poverty, or the equally disgusting word thrift.

Here he had come to children's parties in days when he was a lad and Anne a child of twelve, and here he had always been a welcome visitor and playmate, even to the end of his college years. The motherless, fatherless grandson of old Templeton Thorpe was cherished among heirlooms that never had had a price put upon them. Of all the boys who came to the Tresslyn house, young Braden Thorpe was the heir with the most potent possibility. He did not know it then, but now he knew that on the occasion of his smashing a magnificent porcelain vase the forgiving kiss that Mrs. Tresslyn bestowed upon his flaming cheek

was not due to pity but to farsightedness. Somehow he now felt that he could smash every fragile and inanimate thing in sight, and still escape the kiss.

Not the least regal and imposing object in the room was the woman who stood beside the fireplace, smiling as she always smiled when a situation was at its worst and she at her best. Her high-bred, aristocratic face was as insensitive to an inward softness as a chiseled block of marble is to the eye that gazes upon it in rapt admiration. She had trained herself to smile in the face of the disagreeable; she had acquired the *art* of tranquillity. This long anticipated interview with her daughter's cast-off, bewildered lover was inevitable. They had known that he would come, insistent. She had not kept him waiting. When he came to the house the day after his arrival from England, following close upon a cablegram sent the day after the news of Anne's defection had struck him like a thunderbolt, she was ready to receive him.

And now, quite as calmly and indifferently, she was ready to say good-bye to him forever,— to this man who until a fortnight before had considered himself, and rightly too, to be the affianced husband of her daughter. He meant nothing to her. Her world was complete without him. He possessed her daughter's love,— and all the love she would ever know perhaps, — but even that did not produce within her the slightest qualm. Doubtless Anne would go on loving him to the end of her days. It is the prerogative of women who do not marry for love; it is their right to love the men they do not marry provided they honour the men they do, and keep their skirts clear besides.

Mrs. Tresslyn felt, and honestly too, that her own assurances that Anne loved him would be quite as sat-

isfactory as if Anne were to utter them herself. It all came to the same thing, and she had an idea that she could manage the situation more ably than her daughter.

And Mrs. Tresslyn was quite sure that it would come out all right in the end. She hadn't the remotest doubt that Anne could marry Braden later on, if she cared to do so, and if nothing better offered; so what was there to worry about? Things always shape themselves after the easiest possible fashion. It wasn't as if she was marrying a young man with money. Mrs. Tresslyn had seen things shape themselves before. Moreover, she rather hated the thought of being a grandmother before she was fifty. And so it was really a pleasure to turn this possible son-in-law out of her house just at this time. It would be a very simple matter to open the door to him later on and invite him in.

She stood beside her hearth and watched him go with a calm and far from uneasy eye. He would come again to-morrow, perhaps,— but even at his worst he could not be a dangerous visitor. He was a gentleman. He was a bit distressed. Gentlemen are often put to the test, and they invariably remain gentlemen.

He stopped at the door. "Will you tell Anne that I'll be here to-morrow, Mrs. Tresslyn?"

"I shall tell her, of course," said Mrs. Tresslyn, and lifted her lorgnon.

He went out, filled to the throat with rage and resentment. His strong body was bent as if against a gale, and his hands were tightly clenched in his overcoat pockets. In his haste to get away from the house, he had fairly flung himself into the ulster that Rawson

held for him, and the collar of his coat showed high above the collar of the greatcoat,— a most unusual lapse from orderliness on the part of this always careful dresser.

He was returning to his grandfather's house. Old Templeton Thorpe would be waiting there for him, and Mr. Thorpe's man would be standing outside the library door as was his practice when his master was within, and there would be a sly, patient smile on the servant's lips but not in his sombre eyes. He was returning to his grandfather's house because he had promised to come back and tell the old man how he had fared at the home of his betrothed. The old man had said to him earlier in the afternoon that he would know more about women than he'd ever known before by the time his interview was over, and had drily added that the world was full to overflowing of good women who had not married the men they loved,— principally, he was just enough to explain, because the men they loved preferred to marry other women.

Braden had left him seated in the library after a stormy half-hour; and as he rushed from the room, he found Mr. Thorpe's man standing in the hall outside the door, just as he always stood, waiting for orders with the sly, patient smile on his lips.

For sixty years Templeton Thorpe had lived in the house near Washington Square, and for thirty-two of them Wade had been within sound of his voice, no matter how softly he called. The master never rang a bell, night or day. He did not employ Wade to answer bells. The butler could do that, or the parlourmaid, if the former happened to be tipsier than usual. Wade always kept his head cocked a little to one side, in the attitude of one listening, and so long had he been

at it that it is doubtful if he could have cocked it the other way without snapping something in his neck. That right ear of his was open for business twenty-four hours out of the day. The rest of his body may have slept as soundly as any man's, but his ear was always awake, on land or sea. It was his boast that he had never had a vacation.

Braden, after his long ride down Fifth Avenue on the stage, found Wade in the hall.

"Is my grandfather in the library, Wade?" he asked, surprised to find the man at the foot of the stairs, quite a distance from his accustomed post.

"He is, sir," said Wade. "He asked me to wait here until you arrived and then to go upstairs for a little while, sir. I fancy he has something to say to you in private." Which was a naïve way of explaining that Mr. Thorpe did not want him to have his ear cocked in the hall during the conversation that was to be resumed after an advisable interval. Observing the strange pallor in the young man's usually ruddy face, he solicitously added: "Shall I get you a glass of — ahem! — spirits, sir? A snack of brandy is a handy thing to —"

"No, thank you, Wade. You forget that I am a doctor. I never take medicine," said Braden, forcing a smile.

"A very good idea, sir," said Wade.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Tresslyn had reported to Anne, in the cosy little boudoir at the top of the house in the Seventies.

"It is just as well that you insisted on me seeing him, dear," she said on entering the room. "He would have said things to you that you could not have forgiven. As it is, you have nothing to forgive, and you

have saved yourself a good many tears. He — but, my dear, what's this? Have you been crying?"

Anne, tall and slender, stood with her back to the window, her exquisite face in the shadows. Even in the dim, colourless light of the waning day, she was lovely — lovely even with the wet cheeks and the drooped, whimpering lips.

"What did he say, mother?" she asked, her voice hushed and broken. "How did he look?" Her head was bent and she looked at her mother from beneath pain-contracted brows. "Was he angry? Was he desperate? Did — did he say that he — that he loved me?"

"He looked very well, he was angry, he was desperate and he said that he loved you," replied Mrs. Tresslyn, with the utmost composure. "So dry your eyes. He did just what was to have been expected of him, and just what you counted upon. He —"

"He honestly, truly said that he loved me?" cried the girl, lifting her head and drawing a deep breath.

"Yes,— truly."

Anne dried her eyes with a fresh bit of lace.

"Sit down, mother, and tell me all about it," she said, jerking a small chair around so that it faced the couch. Then she threw herself upon the latter and, reaching out with a slender foot, drew the chair closer. "Sit up close, and let's hear what my future grandson had to say."

CHAPTER III

BRADEN THORPE had spent two years in the New York hospitals, after graduation from Johns Hopkins, and had been sent to Germany and Austria by his grandfather when he was twenty-seven, to work under the advanced scientists of Vienna and Berlin. At twenty-nine he came back to New York, a serious-minded, purposeful man, wrapped up in his profession and heterodoxically humane, to use the words of his grandfather. The first day after his return he confided to his grim old relative the somewhat unprofessional opinion that hopelessly afflicted members of the human race should be put out of their misery by attending physicians, operating under the direction of a commission appointed to consider such cases, and that the act should be authorised by law!

His grandfather, being seventy-six and apparently as healthy as any one could hope to be at that age, said that he thought it would be just as well to kill 'em legally as any other way, having no good opinion of doctors, and admitted that his grandson had an exceptionally soft heart in him even though his head was a trifle harder and thicker than was necessary in one so young.

"It's worth thinking about, anyhow, isn't it, granddaddy?" Braden had said, with great earnestness.

"It is, my boy," said Templeton Thorpe; "especially when you haven't got anything serious the matter with you."

"But if you were hopelessly ill and suffering beyond

all endurance you'd welcome death, wouldn't you?"

"No, I wouldn't," said Mr. Thorpe promptly. "The only time I ever wanted to shuffle off was when your grandmother first refused to marry me. The second time she refused me I decided to do something almost but not quite so terrible, so I went West. The third time I proposed, she accepted me, and out of sheer joy I very stupidly got drunk. So, you see, there is always something to live for," he concluded, with his driest smile.

"I am quite serious about it, grandfather," said Braden stiffly.

"So I perceive. Well, you are planning to hang out your sign here in New York pretty soon, and you are going to become a licensed physician, the confrère and companion of a lot of distinguished gentlemen who believe just as you do about putting sufferers out of their misery but who wouldn't think of doing it, so I'd advise you to keep your opinions to yourself. What do you suppose I sent you abroad for, and gave you an education that few young men have received? Just to see you kicked out of your profession before you've fairly well put a foot into it, or a knife into a plutocrat, or a pill into a pauper? No, sirree, my boy. You sit tight and let the hangman do all the legal killing that has to be done."

"Oh, I know perfectly well that if I advanced this theory,— or scheme,— at present, I'd be kicked out of the profession, notwithstanding the fact that it has all been discussed a million times by doctors in every part of the world. I can't help having the feeling that it would be a great and humane thing —"

"Quite so," broke in the old man, "but let us talk of something else."

A month later Braden came to him and announced that he and Anne Tresslyn were betrothed. They had known each other for years, and from the time that Anne was seventeen Braden had loved her. He had been a quiet, rather shy boy, and she a gay, self-possessed creature whose outlook upon life was so far advanced beyond his, even in those days of adolescence, that he looked upon her as the eighth wonder of the world. She had poise, manner, worldly wisdom of a pleasantly superficial character that stood for sophistication in his blissful estimate of her advantages over him, and she was so adroit in the art of putting her finger upon the right spot at precisely the right moment that he found himself wondering if he could ever bring himself up to her insuperable level.

And when he came home after the two years in Europe, filled with great thoughts and vast pretentions of a singularly unromantic nature, he found her so much lovelier than before that where once he had shyly coveted he now desired with a fervour that swept him headlong into a panic of dread lest he had waited too long and that he had irretrievably lost her while engaged in the wretchedly mundane and commonplace pursuit of trifles. He was intensely amazed, therefore, to discover that she had loved him ever since she was a child in short frocks. He expected her to believe him when he said to her that she was the loveliest of all God's creatures, but it was more than he could believe when she declared that he was as handsome as a Greek god. That, of course, to him was a ludicrous thing to say, a delusion, a fancy that could not be explained, and yet he had seen himself in a mirror a dozen times a day, perhaps, without even suspecting, in his simplicity, that he was an extremely

good-looking chap and well worth a second glance from any one except himself.

The announcement did not come as a surprise to old Mr. Thorpe. He had been expecting it. He realised that Braden's dilatory tactics alone were accountable for the delay in bringing the issue to a head.

"And when do you expect to be married?" he had inquired, squinting at his grandson in a somewhat dubious manner.

"Within the year, I hope," said Braden. "Of course, I shall have to get a bit of a start before we can think of getting married."

"A bit of a start, eh? Expect to get enough of a practice in a year to keep Anne going, do you?"

"We shall live very economically."

"Is that your idea or hers?"

"She knows that I have but little more than two thousand a year, but, of course, it won't take much of a practice to add something to that, you know."

"Besides, you can always depend upon me to help you out, Braden,— that is, within reason," said the other, watching him narrowly out of his shrewd old eyes.

Braden flushed. "You have done more than enough for me already, grandfather. I can't take anything more, you see. I'm going to fight my own way now, sir."

"I see," said Mr. Thorpe. "That's the way to talk, my boy. And what does Anne say to that?"

"She thinks just as I do about it. Oh, she's the right sort, granddaddy, so you needn't worry about us, once we are married."

"Perhaps I should have asked what her mother has to say about it."

"Well, she gave us her blessing," said his grandson, with a happy grin.

"After she had heard about your plan to live on the results of your practice?"

"She said she wasn't going to worry about that, sir. If Anne was willing to wait, so was she."

"Wait for what?"

"My practice to pick up, of course. What do you mean?"

"Just that, of course," said the old man quickly. "Well, my boy, while I daresay it isn't really necessary, I give my consent. I am sure you and Anne will be very happy in your cosy little five-room flat, and that she will be a great help to you. You may even attain to quite a fashionable practice,— or clientele, which is it? — through the Tresslyn position in the city. Thousand dollar appendicitis operations ought to be quite common with you from the outset, with Anne to talk you up a bit among the people who belong to her set and who are always looking for something to keep them from being bored to death. I understand that anybody who has an appendix nowadays is looked upon as exceedingly vulgar and is not even tolerated in good society. As for a man having a sound liver,— well, that kind of a liver is absolutely inexcusable. Nobody has one to-day if he can afford to have the other kind. Good livers always have livers,— and so do bad livers, for that matter. But, now, let us return to the heart. You are quite sure that Anne loves you better than she loves herself? That's quite important, you know. I have found that people who say that they love some one better than anybody else in the world, usually forget themselves,— that is to say, they overlook themselves. How about Anne?"

"Rather epigrammatic, aren't you, granddaddy? I have Anne's word for it, that's all. She wouldn't marry me if she loved any one more than she does me,— not even herself, as you put it. I am sure if I were Anne I should love myself better than all the rest of the world."

"A very pretty speech, my boy. You should make an exceptionally fashionable doctor. You will pardon me for appearing to be cynical, but you see I am a very old man and somewhat warped,— bent, you might say, in my attitude toward the tender passion as it is practised to-day. Still, I shall take your word for it. Anne loves you devotedly, and you love her. The only thing necessary, therefore, is a professional practice, or, in other words, a practical profession. I am sure you will achieve both. You have my best wishes. I love you, my boy. You are the only thing left in life for me to love. Your father was my only son. He would have been a great man, I am sure, if he had not been my son. I spoiled him. I think that is the reason why he died so young. Now, my dear grandson, I am not going to make the mistake with his son that I made with my own. I intend that you shall fight your own battles. Among other things, you will have to fight pretty hard for Anne. That is a mere detail, of course. You are a resolute, determined, sincere fellow, Braden, and you have in you the making of a splendid character. You will succeed in anything you undertake. I like your eye, my boy, and I like the set of your jaw. You have principle and you have a sense of reverence that is quite uncommon in these days of ours. I daresay you have been wicked in an essential sort of way, and I fancy you have been just as necessarily honourable. I don't like a mollycoddle. I don't like anything invertebrate. I despise a Christian who doesn't understand Christ.

Christ despised sin but he didn't despise sinners. And that brings us back to Mrs. Tresslyn,—Constance Blair that was. You will have to be exceedingly well fortified, my boy, if you expect to withstand the clever Constance. She is the refinement of maternal ambition. She will not be satisfied to have her daughter married to a mere practice. She didn't bring her up for that. She will ask me to come and see her within the next few days. What am I to say to her when she asks me if I expect you and Anne to live on what you can earn out of your ridiculous profession?"

"I think that's all pretty well understood," said Braden easily. "You do Mrs. Tresslyn an injustice, granddaddy. She says it will be a splendid thing for Anne to struggle along as we shall have to do for a while. Character building, is the way she puts it."

"Just the same, I shall expect a message from her before the engagement is announced," said the old man drily.

A hard glitter had come into his eyes. He loved this good-looking, earnest grandson of his, and he was troubled. He lay awake half the night thinking over this piece of not unexpected news.

The next morning at breakfast he said to Braden: "See here, my boy, you spoke to me recently about your desire to spend a year in and about the London hospitals before settling down to the real business of life. I've been thinking it over. You can't very well afford to pay for these finishing touches after you've begun struggling along on your own hook, and trying to make both ends meet on a slender income, so I'd suggest that you take this next year as a gift from me and spend it on the other side, working with my good friend, Sir George Bascombe, the greatest of all the English

surgeons. I don't believe you will ever regret it."

Braden was overjoyed. "I should like nothing better, grandfather. By jove, you are good to me. You —"

"It is only right and just that I should give to the last of my race the chance to be a credit to it." There was something cryptic in the remark, but naturally it escaped Braden's notice. "You are the only one of the Thorpes left, my boy. I was an only son and, strange as it may appear, I was singularly without avuncular relatives. It is not surprising, therefore, that I should desire to make a great man out of you. You shall not be handicapped by any failure on my part to do the right thing by you. If it is in my power to safeguard you, it is my duty to exercise that power. Nothing must be allowed to stand in the way or to obstruct your progress. Nothing must be allowed to check your ambition or destroy your courage. So, if you please, I think you ought to have this chance to work with Bascombe. A year is a short time to a chap of your age and experience, and it may be the most valuable one in a long and successful life."

"If I can ever grow to be half as wise and half as successful as you, grandfather, I shall have achieved more than —"

"My boy, I inherited my success and I've been more of a fool than you suspect. My father left me with two or three millions of dollars, and the little wisdom that I have acquired I would pass on to you instead of money if it were possible to do so. A man cannot bequeath his wisdom. He may inherit it, but he can't give it away, for the simple reason that no one will take it as a gift. It is like advice to the young: something to disregard. My father left me a great deal of money, and I was too

much of a coward to become a failure. Only the brave men are failures. They are the ones who take the risks. If you are going to be a surgeon, be a great one. Now, when do you think you can go to London?"

Braden, his face aglow, was not long in answering. "I'll speak to Anne about it to-night. If she is willing to marry me at once, we'll start immediately. By Jove, sir, it is wonderful! It is the greatest thing that ever happened to a fellow. I—"

"Ah, but I'm afraid that doesn't fit in with my plan," interrupted the old man, knitting his brows. "It is my idea that you should devote yourself to observation and not to experimentation,— to study instead of honeymooning. A bride is out of the question, Braden. This is to be my year and not Anne's."

They were a week thrashing it out, and in the end it was Mrs. Tresslyn who settled the matter. She had had her talk with Mr. Templeton Thorpe, and, after hearing all that he had to say, expressed herself in no uncertain terms on the advisability of postponing the wedding for a year if not longer. Something she said in private to Anne appeared to have altered that charming young person's notions in regard to an early wedding, so Braden found himself without an ally. He went to London early in the fall, with Anne's promises safely stowed away in his heart, and he came back in the middle of his year with Sir George, dazed and bewildered by her faithlessness and his grandfather's perfidy.

Out of a clear sky had come the thunderbolt. And then, while he was still dazed and furious, his grandfather had tried to convince him that he had done him a deuce of a good turn in showing up Anne Tresslyn!

In patience the old man had listened to his grandson's tirade, his ravings, his anathemas. He had heard

himself called a traitor. He had smiled grimly on being described as a satyr! When words and breath at last failed the stalwart Braden, the old gentleman, looking keenly out from beneath his shaggy brows, and without the slightest trace of resentment in his manner, suggested that they leave the matter to Anne.

"If she really wants you, my boy, she'll chuck me and my two-million-dollar purse out of the window, so to speak, and she'll marry you in spite of your poverty. If she does that, I'll be satisfied. I'll step down and out and I'll praise God for his latest miracle. If she looks at it from the other point of view,— the perfectly safe and secure way, you understand,— and confirms her allegiance to me, I'll still be exceedingly happy in the consciousness that I've done you a good turn. I will enter my extreme old age in the race against your healthy youth. I will proffer my three or four remaining years to her as against the fifty you may be able to give her. Go and see her at once. Then come back here to me and tell me what she says."

And so it was that Braden Thorpe returned, as he had agreed to do, to the home of the man who had robbed him of his greatest possession,— faith in woman. He found his grandfather seated in the library, in front of a half-dead fire. A word, in passing, to describe this remarkable old man. He was tall and thin, and strangely erect for one of his years. His gaunt, seamed face was beardless and almost repellent in its severity. In his deep-set, piercing eyes lurked all the pains of a life-time. He had been a strong, robust man; the framework was all that remained of the staunch house in which his being had dwelt for so long. His hand shook and his knee rebelled against exertion, but his eye was unwavering, his chin unflinching. White and sparse was the thatch

of hair upon his shrunken skull, and harsh was the thin voice that came from his straight, colourless lips. He walked with a cane, and seldom without the patient, much-berated Wade at his elbow, a prop against the dreaded day when his legs would go back on him and the brink would appear abruptly out of nowhere at his very feet. And there were times when he put his hand to his side and held it there till the look of pain softened about his mouth and eyes, though never quite disappeared.

CHAPTER IV

IT was Templeton Thorpe's contention that Braden was a family investment, and that a good investment will take care of itself if properly handled. He considered himself quite capable of making a man of Braden, but he did not allow the boy to think that the job was a one-sided undertaking. Braden worked for all that he received. There was no silver platter, no golden spoon in Mr. Thorpe's cupboard. They understood each other perfectly and Templeton Thorpe was satisfied with his investment.

That is why his eyes twinkled when Braden burst into the library after his fruitless appeal to Mrs. Tresslyn. He smiled as one smiles with relief when a craft he is watching glides safely but narrowly past a projecting abutment.

"Calm yourself," he remarked after Braden's somewhat wild and incoherent beginning. "And sit down. You will not get anywhere pacing this twenty by thirty room, and you are liable to run into something immovable if you don't stop glaring at me and watch out where you are going instead."

"Sit down?" shouted Braden, stopping before the old man in the chair, his hands clinched and his teeth showing. "I'll never sit down in your house again! What do you think I am? A snivelling, cringing dog that has to lick your hand for—"

"Now, now!" admonished the old man, without anger. "If you will not sit down, at least be kind enough to stand still. I can't understand half you say

while you are stamping around like that. This isn't a china shop. Control yourself. Now, let's have it in so many words and not so many gesticulations. So Anne declined to see you, eh?"

"I don't believe Anne had a voice in the matter. Mrs. Tresslyn is at the back of all this. She is the one who has roped you in,— duped you, or whatever you choose to call it without resorting to profanity. She's forcing Anne into this damnable marriage, and she is making a perfect fool of you. Can't you see it? Can't you see — but, my God, how can I ask that question of you? When a man gets to be as old as you, he —" He broke off abruptly, on the point of uttering the unforgivable.

"Go on, my boy," said Templeton Thorpe quietly. "Say it. I shan't mind."

"Oh, what's the use?" groaned the miserable lover. "I cannot say anything more to you, sir, than I said early this afternoon. I told you then just what I think of your treachery. There isn't anything more for me to say, but I'd like you to know that Anne despises you. Her mother acknowledges that much at least,— and, curse her, without shame!"

"I am quite well aware of the fact, Braden," said the old man. "You couldn't expect her to love me, could you?"

"Then, why in God's name are you marrying her? Why are you spoiling my life? Why are you —"

"Is it spoiling your life to have the girl you love turn to and marry an old wreck such as I am, just because I happen to be willing to pay her two million dollars,— in advance, you might say? Is that spoiling your life or saving it?"

Mr. Thorpe had dropped the cynical, half-amused air,

and was now speaking with great intensity. Braden, struck by the change, turned suddenly to regard the old man with a new and puzzled light in his lowering eyes.

"See here, my lad, you've had your chance. I knew what I was about when I sent you to see her. I knew precisely what would happen. She wants to marry you, but she prefers to marry me. That isn't as ambiguous as it sounds. Just think it over,— later on, not now, for I have something else to say to you. Do me the honour to be seated. Thank you. Now, you've got quite a good-sized, respectable nose upon your face. I submit that the situation is quite as plain as that nose, if you look at it in the broad light of understanding. If you think that I am marrying Anne because I love her, or because I am in my dotage and afflicted with senility, you are very much mistaken. If you think I am giving her two million dollars as a wedding gift because I expect it to purchase her love and esteem, you do my intelligence an injustice. If you think that I relish the prospect of having that girl in my house from now till the day I die, worrying the soul out of me, you are too simple for words. I am marrying her, not because I love her, my lad, but — but because I love *you*. God forbid that I should ever sink so low as to steal from my own flesh and blood. Stealing is one thing, bartering another. I expect to convince you that I have not taken anything from you that is of value, hence I am not a malefactor."

Braden, seated opposite him, his elbows on the arms of the chair, leaned forward and watched the old man curiously. A new light had come into his eyes when Mr. Thorpe uttered those amazing words —"but because I love *you*." He was beginning to see, he was beginning

to analyse the old man's motives, he was groping his way out of the fog.

"You will have hard work to convince me that I have not been treated most unfairly, most vilely," said he, his lips still compressed.

"Many years ago," said Mr. Thorpe, fixing his gaze on the lazy fire, "I asked Anne's grandmother to marry me. I suppose I thought that I was unalterably in love with her. I was the very rich son of a very rich man, and — pardon my conceit — what you would call an exceedingly good catch. Well, in those days things were not as they are now. The young lady, a great beauty and amazingly popular, happened to be in love with Roger Blair, a good-looking chap with no fortune and no prospects. She took the advice of her mother and married the man she loved, disdaining my riches and me as well. Roger wasn't much of a success as a husband, but he was a source of enlightenment and education to his wife. Not in the way you would suspect, however. He managed in very short order to convince her that it is a very ignorant mother who permits her daughter to marry a man without means. They hadn't been married three years when his wife had learned her lesson. It was too late to get rid of Roger, and by that time I was happily married to a girl who was quite as rich as I, and could afford to do as she pleased. So, you see, Anne's grandmother had to leave me out of the case, even though Roger would have been perfectly delighted to have given her sufficient grounds for divorce. I think you knew Anne's grandmother, Braden?" He paused for an answer, a sly, appraising look in his eyes. Receiving no response except a slight nod of the head, he chuckled softly and went on with the history.

"Poor soul, she's gone to her reward. Now we come

to Anne's mother. She was an only child,— and one was quite enough, I assure you. No mother ever had greater difficulty in satisfactorily placing a daughter than had Mrs. Blair. There was an army of young but not very dependable gentlemen who would have married her like a flash, notwithstanding her own poverty, had it not been for the fact that Mrs. Blair was so thoroughly educated by this time that she couldn't even contemplate a mistake in her calculations. She had had ample proof that love doesn't keep the wolf from the door, nor does it draw five per cent. as some other bonds do. She brought Constance up in what is now considered to be the most approved fashion in high society. The chap who had nothing but health and ambition and honour and brains to offer, in addition to that unprofitable thing called love, was a viper in Mrs. Blair's estimation. He was very properly and promptly stamped upon by the fond mother and doubtless was very glad to crawl off into the high grass, out of danger. He —"

"What has all this got to do with your present behaviour?" demanded Braden harshly. "Speaking of vipers," he added, by way of comment.

"I am coming to that," said Mr. Thorpe, resenting the interruption but not its sting. "After a careful campaign, Arthur Tresslyn was elected. He had a great deal of money, a kind heart and scarcely any brains. He was an ideal choice, everybody was agreed upon that. The fellow that Constance was really in love with at the time, Jimmy Gordon, was a friend of your father's. Well, the gentle Arthur went to pieces financially a good many years ago. He played hob with all the calculations, and so we find Constance, his wife, lamenting in the graveyard of her hopes and cursing Jimmy Gordon for his unfaithfulness in marrying be-

fore he was in a position to do so. If Jimmy had remained single for twelve years longer than he did, I daresay Arthur's widow would have succeeded in nabbing him whether or no. Arthur managed to die very happily, they say, quite well pleased with himself for having squandered the fortune which brought him so much misery. Now we come to Anne, Arthur's daughter. She became deeply enamoured of a splendid, earnest young chap named Braden Thorpe, grandson of the wealthy and doddering Templeton Thorpe, and recognised as his sole heir. Keep your seat, Braden; I am coming to the point. This young Thorpe trusted the fair and beautiful Anne. He set out to make a name and fortune for himself and for her. He sought knowledge and experience in distant lands, leaving his poor old grandfather at home with nothing to amuse himself with except nine millions of dollars and his dread of death. While Braden was experimenting in London, this doddering, senile old gentleman of Washington Square began to experiment a little on his own account. He set out to discover just what sort of stuff this Anne Tresslyn was made of and to prove to himself that she was worthy of his grandson's love. He began with the girl's mother. As soon as possible, he explained to her that money is a curse. She agreed that money is a curse if you haven't got it. In time, he confessed to her that he did not mean to curse his grandson with an unearned fortune, and that he intended to leave him in his will the trifling sum of fifty thousand dollars, thereby endowing him with the ambition and perhaps the energy to earn more and at the same time be of great benefit to the world in which he would have to struggle. Also, he let it be known that he was philanthropically inclined, that he purposed giving a great many millions to science,

and that his death would be of untold value to the human race. Are you attending, Braden? If you are not, I shall stop talking at once. It is very exhausting and I haven't much breath or time to waste."

"I am listening. Go on," said Braden, suddenly sitting up in his chair and taking a long, deep breath. The angry, antagonistic light was gone from his eyes.

"Well, the clever Mrs. Tresslyn was interested — deeply interested in my disclosures. She did not hesitate to inform me that Anne couldn't begin to live on the income from a miserable fifty thousand, and actually laughed in my face when I reminded her of the young lady's exalted preference for love in a cottage and joy at any price. Biding my time, I permitted the distressing truth to sink in. You will remember that Anne's letters began to come less frequently about four months ago, and —"

"How do you happen to know about that?" broke in the young man, in surprise.

"Where she had been in the habit of writing twice and even three times a week," went on Mr. Thorpe, "she was content to set herself to the task of dropping you a perfunctory letter once in a fortnight. You will also recall that her letters were not so full of intensity — or enthusiasm: they lacked fervour, they fell off considerably in many ways. I happen to know about all this, Braden, because putting two and two together has always been exceedingly simple for me. You see, it was about three months ago that Anne began to reveal more than casual interest in Percy Wintermill. She —"

"Percy Wintermill!" gasped Braden, clutching the arms of his chair. "Why, she has always looked upon him as the stupidest, ugliest man in town. His attentions have been a standing joke between us. He is

crazy about her, I know, but — oh, well, go on with the story."

"To be sure he is crazy about her, as you say. That isn't strange. Half the young men in town think they are in love with her, and most of them believe she could make them happy. Now, no one concedes physical beauty or allurement to Percy. He is as ugly as they grow, but he isn't stupid. He is just a nice, amiable, senseless nincompoop with a great deal of money and a tremendous amount of health. He —"

"I like Wintermill. He is one of my best friends. He is as square as any man I know and he would be the last person to try to come between Anne and me. He is too fond of me for that, sir. You —"

"Unfortunately he was not aware of the fact that you and Anne were engaged. You forget that the engagement was to be kept under cover for the time being. But all this is beside the question. Mrs. Tresslyn had looked the field over pretty carefully. No one appeared to be so well qualified to take your place as Percy Wintermill. He had everything that is desirable in a husband except good looks and perhaps good manners. So she began fishing for Percy. Anne was a delightful bait. Of course, Percy's robust health was objectionable, but it wasn't insurmountable. I could see that Anne loathed the thought of having him for a husband for thirty or forty years. Anybody could see that,— even Percy must have possessed intelligence enough to see it for himself. Finally, about six weeks ago, Anne rose above her environment. She allowed Percy to propose, asked for a few days in which to make up her mind, and then came out with a point-blank refusal. She defied her mother, openly declaring that she would marry you in spite of everything."

"And that is just what she shall do, poor girl," cried Braden joyously. "She shall not be driven into —"

"Just a moment, please. When I discovered that young Wintermill couldn't be depended upon to rescue his best friend, I stepped into the arena, so to speak," said Mr. Thorpe with fine irony. "I sensed the situation perfectly. Percy was young and strong and enduring. He would be a long time dying in the natural order of things. What Anne was looking for — now, keep your seat, my boy! — what she wanted was a husband who could be depended upon to leave her a widow before it was too late. Now, I am seventy-seven, and failing pretty rapidly. It occurred to me that I would be just the thing for her. To make the story short, I began to dilate upon my great loneliness, and also hinted that if I could find the right sort of companion I would jump at the chance to get married. That's putting it rather coarsely, my boy, but the whole business is so ugly that it doesn't seem worth while to affect delicacy. Inside of two weeks, we had come to an understanding,— that is, an arrangement had been perfected. I think that everything was agreed upon except the actual day of my demise. As you know, I am to set aside for Anne as an ante-nuptial substitute for all dower rights in my estate, the sum of two million dollars. I may add that the securities guaranteeing this amount have been submitted to Mrs. Tresslyn and she has found them to be gilt-edged. These securities are to be held in trust for her until the day I die, when they go to her at once, according to our contract. She agrees to —"

"By gad, sir, it is infamous! Absolutely infamous!" exclaimed young Thorpe, springing to his feet. "I cannot — I will not believe it of her."

"She agrees to relinquish all claims to my estate,"

concluded the old man, with a chuckle. "Inasmuch as I have made it quite clear that all of my money is to go to charity,— scientific charity,— I imagine that the Tresslyns feel that they have made a pretty good bargain."

"I still maintain that she will renounce the whole detestable —"

"She would go back on her contract like a shot if she thought that I intended to include you among my scientific charities," interrupted the old man.

"Oh, if I could only have an hour — half an hour with her," groaned Braden. "I could overcome the vile teaching of her mother and bring her to a realisation of what is ahead of her. I —"

"Do you honestly,— in your heart, Braden,— believe that you could do that?" demanded Mr. Thorpe, arising from his chair and laying his hand upon the young man's shoulder. He forced the other's eyes to meet his. "Do you believe that she would be worthy of your love and respect even though she did back out of this arrangement? I want an honest answer."

"God help me, I — I don't know what to think," cried Braden miserably. "I am shocked, bewildered. I can't say what I believe, grandfather. I only know that I have loved her better than my own soul. I don't know what to think now."

"You might also say that she loves herself better than she loves her own soul," said the old man grimly. "She will go on loving you, I've no doubt, in a strictly physical way, but I wouldn't put much dependence in her soulfulness. One of these fine days, she will come to you and say that she has earned two million dollars, and she will ask you if it is too late to start all over again. What will you say to that?"

"Good Lord, sir, what would you expect me to say?" exploded Braden. "I should tell her to — to go to hell!" he grated between his teeth.

"Meanwhile, I want you to understand that I have acted for your best interests, Braden. God knows I am not in love with this girl. I know her kind, I know her breed. I want to save you from — well, I want to give you a fighting chance to be a great, good man. You need the love of a fine, unselfish woman to help you to the heights you aspire to reach. Anne Tresslyn would not have helped you. She cannot see above her own level. There are no heights for her. She belongs to the class that never looks up from the ground. They are always following the easiest path. I am doing you a good turn. Somewhere in this world there is a noble, self-sacrificing woman who will make you happy, who will give strength to you, who will love you for yourself and not for *herself*. Go out and find her, my boy. You will recognise her the instant you see her."

"But you — what of you?" asked Braden, deeply impressed by the old man's unsuspected sentiment. "Will you go ahead and — and marry her, knowing that she will make your last few years of life unhappy, un —"

"I am under contract," said Templeton Thorpe grimly. "I never go back on a contract."

"I shall see her, nevertheless," said Braden doggedly.

"It is my desire that you should. In fact, I shall make it my business to see that you do. After that, I fancy you will not care to remain here for the wedding. I should advise you to return to London as soon as you have had it out with her."

"I shall remain here until the very hour of the wed-

ding if it is to take place, and up to that very hour I shall do my best to prevent it, grandfather."

"Your failure to do so will make me the happiest man in New York," said Mr. Thorpe, emotion in his voice, "for I love you dearly, Braden."

CHAPTER V

A CONSPICUOUS but somewhat unimportant member of the Tresslyn family was a young man of twenty-four. He was Anne's brother, and he had preceded her into the world by the small matter of a year and two months. Mrs. Tresslyn had set great store by him. Being a male child he did not present the grave difficulties that attend the successful launching and disposal of the female of the species to which the Tresslyn family belonged. He was born with the divine right to pick and choose, and that is something that at present appears to be denied the sisters of men. But the amiable George, at the age of one and twenty and while still a freshman in college, picked a girl without consulting his parent and in a jiffy put an end to the theory that man's right is divine.

It took more than half of Mrs. Tresslyn's income for the next two years, the ingenuity of a firm of expensive lawyers, the skill of nearly a dozen private detectives, and no end of sleepless nights to untie the loathsome knot, and even then George's wife had a shade the better of them in that she reserved the right to call herself Mrs. Tresslyn, quite permanently disgracing his family although she was no longer a part of it.

The young woman was employed as a demonstrator for a new brand of mustard when George came into her life. The courtship was brief, for she was a pretty girl and virtuous. She couldn't see why there should be anything wrong in getting married, and therefore was very much surprised, and not a little chagrined, to find

out almost immediately after the ceremony that she had committed a heinous and unpardonable sin. She shrank for a while under the lashings, and then, like a beast driven to cover, showed her teeth.

If marriage was not sanctuary, she would know the reason why. With a single unimposing lawyer and not the remotest suggestion of a detective to reinforce her position, she took her stand against the unhappy George and his mother, and so successful were her efforts to make divorce difficult that she came out of chambers with thirty thousand dollars in cash, an aristocratic name, and a valuable claim to theatrical distinction.

All this transpired less than two years prior to the events which were to culminate in the marriage of George's only sister to the Honourable Templeton Thorpe of Washington Square. Needless to say, George was now looked upon in the small family as a liability. He was a never-present help in time of trouble. The worst thing about him was his obstinate regard for the young woman who still bore his name but was no longer his wife. At twenty-four he looked upon himself as a man who had nothing to live for. He spent most of his time gnashing his teeth because the pretty little divorcee was receiving the attentions of young gentlemen in his own set, without the slightest hint of opposition on the part of their parents, while he was obliged to look on from afar off.

It appears that parents do not object to young women of insufficient lineage provided the said young women keep at a safe distance from the marriage altar.

It is interesting to note in this connection, however, that little Mrs. George Tresslyn was a model of propriety despite her sprightly explorations of a world that had been strange to her up to the time she was cast

into it by a disgusted mother-in-law, and it is still more interesting to find that she nourished a sly hope that some day George would kick over the traces in a very manly fashion and marry her all over again!

Be that as it may, the bereft and humiliated George favoured his mother and sister with innumerable half-hours in which they had to contend with scornful and exceedingly bitter opinions on the iniquity of marriage as it is practised among the elect. He fairly bawled his disapproval of the sale of Anne to the decrepit Mr. Thorpe, and there was not a day in the week that did not contain at least one unhappy hour for the women in his home, for just so often he held forth on the sanctity of the marriage vows.

He was connected with a down-town brokerage firm and he was as near to being a failure in the business as an intimate and life-long friend of the family would permit him to be and still allow him to remain in the office. His business was the selling of bonds. The friend of the family was the head of the firm, so no importance should be attached to the fact that George did not earn his salt as a salesman. It is only necessary to report that the young man made frequent and determined efforts to sell his wares, but with so little success that he would have been discouraged had it not been for the fact that he was intimately acquainted with himself. He knew himself too well to expect people to take much stock in the public endeavours of one whose private affairs were so far beneath notice. Men were not likely to overlook the disgraceful treatment of the little "mustard girl," for even the men who have mistreated women in their time overlook their own chicanery in preaching decency over the heads of others who have not played the game fairly. George looked upon himself as a

marked man, against whom the scorn of the world was justly directed.

Strange as it may appear, George Tresslyn was a tall, manly looking fellow, and quite handsome. At a glance you would have said that he had a great deal of character in his make-up and would get on in the world. Then you would hear about his matrimonial delinquency and instantly you would take a second glance. The second and more searching look would have revealed him as a herculean light-weight,— a man of strength and beauty and stature spoiled in the making. And you would be sorry that you had made the discovery, for it would take you back to his school days, and then you would encounter the causes.

He had gone to a preparatory school when he was twelve. It was eight years before he got into the freshman class of the college that had been selected as the one best qualified to give him a degree, and there is no telling how long he might have remained there, faculty willing, had it not been for the interfering "mustard girl." He could throw a hammer farther and run the hundred faster than any youth in the freshman class, and he could handle an oar with the best of them, but as he had spent nearly eight years in acquiring this proficiency to the exclusion of anything else it is not surprising that he excelled in these pursuits, nor is it surprising that he possessed a decided aversion for the things that are commonly taught in college by studious-looking gentlemen who do not even belong to the athletic association and have forgotten their college yell.

George boasted, in his freshman year, that if the faculty would let him alone he could easily get through the four years without flunking a single thing in athletics. It was during the hockey season, just after the Christ-

mas holidays, that he married the pretty "mustard girl" and put an abrupt end to what must now be regarded as a superficial education.

He carried his athletic vigour into the brokerage offices, however. No one could accuse him of being lazy, and no one could say that he did not make an effort. He possessed purpose and determination after a fashion, for he was proud and resentful; but he lacked perspective, no matter which way he looked for it. Behind him was a foggy recollection of the things he should have learned, and ahead was the dark realisation that the world is made up principally of men who cannot do the mile under thirty minutes but who possess amazing powers of endurance when it comes to running circles around the man who is trained to do the hundred yard dash in ten seconds flat.

A few minutes after Braden Thorpe's departure from the Tresslyn drawing-room, young George entered the house and stamped upstairs to his combination bedchamber and sitting-room on the top floor. He always went upstairs three steps at a time, as if in a hurry to have it over with. He had a room at the top of the house because he couldn't afford one lower down. A delayed sense of compunction had ordered Mrs. Tresslyn to insist upon George's paying his own way through life, now that he was of age and working for himself.

When George found it impossible to pay his week's reckoning out of his earnings, he blithely borrowed the requisite amount — and a little over — from friends down-town, and thereby enjoyed the distinction of being uncommonly prompt in paying his landlady on the dot. So much for character-building.

And now one of these "muckers" down-town was annoying him with persistent demands for the return of

numerous small loans extending over a period of nineteen months. That sort of thing isn't done among gentlemen, according to George Tresslyn's code. For a month or more he had been in the humiliating position of being obliged to dodge the fellow, and he was getting tired of it. The whole amount was well under six hundred dollars, and as he had made it perfectly plain to the beggar that he was drawing ten per cent. on the loans, he couldn't see what sense there was in being in such a hurry to collect. On the other hand, as the beggar wasn't receiving the interest, it is quite possible that he could not look at the situation from George's point of view.

Young Mr. Tresslyn finally had reached the conclusion that he would have to ask his mother for the money. He knew that the undertaking would prove a trying one, so he dashed up to his room for the purpose of fortifying himself with a stiff drink of benedictine.

Having taken the drink, he sat down for a few minutes to give it a chance to become inspirational. Then he skipped blithely down to his mother's boudoir and rapped on the door,— not timidly or imploringly but with considerable authority. Receiving no response, he moved on to Anne's sitting-room, whence came the subdued sound of voices in conversation. He did not knock at Anne's door, but boldly opened it and advanced into the room.

"Hello! Here you are," said George amiably.

He was met by a cold, disapproving stare from his mother and a little gasp of dismay from Anne. It was quite apparent that he was an intruder.

"I wish you would be good enough to knock before entering, George," said Mrs. Tresslyn severely.

"I did," said George, "but you were not in. I al-

ways knock at your door, mother. You can't say that I've ever forgotten to do it." He looked aggrieved. "You surely don't mean that I ought to knock at Anne's door?"

"Certainly. What do you want?"

"Well," he began, depositing his long body on the couch and preparing to stretch out, "I'd like to kiss both of you if you'll let me."

"Don't be silly," said Anne, "and don't put your feet on that clean chintz."

"All right," said he cheerfully. "My, how lovely the bride is looking to-day! I wish old Tempy could see you now. He'd —"

"If you are going to be disagreeable, George, you may get out at once," said Mrs. Tresslyn.

"I never felt less like being objectionable in my life," said he, "so if you don't mind I'll stay awhile. By the way, Anne, speaking of disagreeable things, I am sure I saw Brady Thorpe on the avenue a bit ago. Has your discarded skeleton come back with a key to your closet?"

"Braden is in New York," said his mother acidly. "Is it necessary for you to be vulgar, George?"

"Not at all," said he. "When did he arrive? I hope you don't see anything vulgar in that, mother," he made haste to add.

"He reached New York to-day, I think. He has been here to see me. He has gone away. There is nothing more to be said, so please be good enough to consider the subject —"

"Gee! but I'd like to have heard what he had to say to you!"

"I am glad that you didn't," said Anne, "for if you had you might have been under the painful necessity of

calling him to account for it, and I don't believe you'd like that."

"Facetious, eh? Well, my mind is relieved at any rate. He spoke up like a little man, didn't he, mother? I thought he would. And I'll bet you gave him as good as he sent, so he's got his tail between his legs now and yelping for mercy. How does he look, Anne? Handsome as ever?"

"Anne did not see him."

"Of course she didn't. How stupid of me. Where is he stopping?"

"With his grandfather, I suppose," said Mrs. Tresslyn, as tolerant as possible.

"Naturally. I should have known that without asking. Getting the old boy braced up for the wedding, I suppose. Pumping oxygen into him, and all that sort of thing. And that reminds me of something else. I may give myself the pleasure of a personal call upon my prospective brother-in-law to-morrow."

"What?" cried his mother sharply.

"Yep," said George blithely. "I may have to do it. It's purely a business matter, so don't worry. I shan't say a word about the wedding. Far be it from me to distress an old gentleman about —"

"What business can you have with Mr. Thorpe?" demanded his mother.

"Well, as I don't believe in keeping secrets from you, mother, I'll explain. You see, I want to see if I can't negotiate the sale of a thousand dollar note. Mr. Thorpe may be in the market to buy a good, safe, gilt-edge note —"

"Come to the point. Whose note are you trying to sell?"

"My own," said George promptly.

Anne laughed. "You would spell gilt with a letter u inserted before the i, in that case, wouldn't you?"

"I give you my word," said George, "I don't know how to spell it. The two words sound exactly alike and I'm always confusing them."

His mother came and stood over him. "George, you are not to go to Mr. Thorpe with your pecuniary difficulties. I forbid it, do you understand?"

"Forbid it, mother? Great Scot, what's wrong in an honest little business transaction? I shall give him the best of security. If he doesn't care to let me have the money on the note, that's his affair. It's business, not friendship, I assure you. Old Tempy knows a good thing when he sees it. I shall also promise to pay twenty per cent. interest for two years from date. Two years, do you understand? If anything should happen to him before the two years are up, I'd still owe the money to his estate, wouldn't I? You can't deny that —"

"Stop! Not another word, sir! Am I to believe that I have a son who is entirely devoid of principle? Are you so lacking in pride that —"

"It depends entirely on how you spell the word, prin*cipal* or with a *ple*. I am entirely devoid of the one ending in pal, and I don't see what pride has to do with it anyway. Ask Anne. She can tell you all that is necessary to know about the Tresslyn pride."

"Shut up!" said Anne languidly.

"It's just this way, mother," said George, sitting up, with a frown. "I've got to have five or six hundred dollars. I'll be honest with you, too. I owe nearly that much to Percy Wintermill, and he is making himself infernally obnoxious about it."

"Percy Wintermill? Have you been borrowing money from him?"

"In a way, yes. That is, I've been asking him for it and he's been lending it to me. I don't think I've ever used the word borrow in a single instance. I hate the word. I simply say: 'Percy, let me take twenty-five for a week or two, will you?' and Percy says, 'All right, old boy,' and that's all there is to it. Percy's been all right up to a few weeks ago. In fact, I don't believe he would have mentioned the matter at all if Anne hadn't turned him down on New Year's Eve. Why the deuce did you refuse him, Anne? He'd always been decent till you did that. Now he's perfectly impossible."

"You know perfectly well why I refused him," said Anne, lifting her eye-brows slightly.

"Right-o! It was because you were engaged to Brady Thorpe. I quite forgot. I apologise. You were quite right in refusing him. Be that as it may, however, Percy is as sore as a crab. I can't go around owing money to a chap who has been refused by my sister, can I? One of the Wintermills, too. By Jove, it's awful!" He looked extremely distressed.

"You are not to go to Mr. Thorpe," said his mother from the chair into which she had sunk in order to preserve a look of steadiness. A fine moisture had come out upon her upper lip. "You must find an honourable way in which to discharge your debts."

"Isn't my note as good as anybody's?" he demanded.

"No. It isn't worth a dollar."

"Ah, but it *will* be if Mr. Thorpe buys it," said he in triumph. "He could discount it for full value, if he wanted to. That's precisely what makes it good. I'm

afraid you don't know very much about high finance, mother dear."

"Please go away, George," complained Anne. "Mother and I have a great deal to talk about, and you are a dreadful nuisance when you discover a reason for coming home so long before dinner-time. Can't you pawn something?"

"Don't be ridiculous," said George.

"Why did you borrow money from Percy Wintermill?" demanded Mrs. Tresslyn.

"There you go, mother, using that word 'borrow' again. I wish you wouldn't. It's a vulgar word. You might as well say, 'Why did you *swipe* money from Percy Wintermill?' He lent it to me because he realised how darned hard-up we are and felt sorry for me, I suppose."

"For heaven's sake, George, don't tell me that you —"

"Don't look so horrified, mother," he interrupted. "I didn't tell him we were hard-up. I merely said, from time to time, 'Let me take fifty, Percy.' I can't help it if he *suspects*, can I? And say, Anne, he was so terribly in love with you that he would have let me take a thousand any time I wanted it, if I'd had occasion to ask him for it. You ought to be thankful that I didn't."

"Don't drag me into it," said Anne sharply.

"I admit I was fooled all along," said he, with a rueful sigh. "I had an idea that you'd be tickled to death to marry into the Wintermill family. Position, money, family jewels, and all that sort of thing. Everything desirable except Percy. And then, just when I thought something might come of it, you up and get engaged to Brady Thorpe, keeping it secret from the

public into the bargain. Confound it, you didn't even tell me till last fall. Your stupid secretiveness allowed me to go on getting into Percy's debt, when a word from you might have saved me a lot of trouble."

"Will you kindly leave the room, George?" said his mother, arising.

"Percy is making himself fearfully obnoxious," went on George ominously. "For nearly three weeks I've been dodging him, and it can't go on much longer. One of these fine days, mother, a prominent member of the Wintermill family is going to receive a far from exclusive thrashing. That's the only way I can think of to stop him, if I can't raise the money to pay him up. Some day I'm going to refrain from dodging and he is going to run right square into this." He held up a brawny fist. "I'm going to hold it just so, and it won't be too high for his nose, either. Then I'm going to pick him up and turn him around, with his face toward the Battery, and kick just as hard as I know how. I'll bet my head he'll not bother me about money after that — unless, of course, he's cad enough to sue me. I don't think he'll do that, however, being a proud and haughty Wintermill. I suppose we'll all be eliminated from the Wintermill invitation list after that, and it may be that we'll go without a fashionable dinner once in awhile, but what's all that to the preservation of the family dignity?"

Mrs. Tresslyn leaned suddenly against a chair, and even Anne turned to regard her tall brother with a look of real dismay.

"How much do you owe him?" asked the former, controlling her voice with an effort.

"Five hundred and sixty-five dollars, including interest. A pitiful sum to get thrashed for, isn't it?"

"And you were planning to get the money from Mr. Thorpe to pay Percy?"

"To keep Percy from getting licked, would be the better way to put it. I think it's uncommonly decent of me."

"You are — you are a bully, George,— a downright bully," flared Anne, confronting him with blazing eyes. "You have no right to frighten mother in this way. It's cowardly."

"He doesn't frighten me, dear," said Mrs. Tresslyn, but her lips quivered. Turning to her son, she continued: "George, if you will mail a check to Percy this minute, I will draw one for you. A Tresslyn cannot owe money to a Wintermill. We will say no more about it. The subject is closed. Sit down there and draw a check for the amount, and I will sign it. Rawson will post it."

George turned his head away, and lowered his chin. A huskiness came quickly into his voice.

"I'm — I'm ashamed of myself, mother,— I give you my word I am. I came here intending to ask you point-blank to advance me the money. Then the idea came into my head to work the bluff about old Mr. Thorpe. That grew into Percy's prospective thrashing. I'm sorry. It's the first time I've ever tried to put anything over on you."

"Fill in the check, please," she said coldly. "I've just been drawing a few for the dressmakers — a few that Anne has just remembered. I shan't in the least mind adding one for Percy. He isn't a dressmaker but if I were asked to select a suitable occupation for him I don't know of one he'd be better qualified to pursue. Fill it in, please."

Her son looked at her admiringly. "By Jove, mother, you are a wonder. You never miss fire. I'd

give a thousand dollars, if I had it, to see old Mrs. Wintermill's face if that remark could be repeated to her."

A faint smile played about his mother's lips. After all, there was honest tribute in the speech of this son of hers.

"It would be worse than a bloody nose for Percy," said Anne, slipping an arm around her mother's waist. "But I don't like what you said about *me* and the dressmakers. I must have gowns. It isn't quite the same as George's I.O.U. to Percy, you know."

"Don't be selfish, Anne," cried George, jerking a chair up to the escritoire and scrambling among the papers for a pen. "You won't have to worry long. You'll soon be so rich that the dressmakers won't dare to send you a bill."

"Wait a moment, George," said Mrs. Tresslyn abruptly. "If you do not promise to refrain from saying disagreeable things to Anne, I shall withdraw my offer to help you out of this scrape."

George faced her. "Does that mean that I am to put my O. K. upon this wedding of Anne's?" His look of good-nature disappeared.

"It means that you are not to comment upon it, that's all," said his mother. "You have said quite enough. There is nothing more that you can add to an already sufficiently distasteful argument."

George swallowed hard as he bent over the checkbook. "All right, mother, I'll try to keep my trap closed from now on. But I don't want you to think that I'm taking this thing pleasantly. I'll say for the last time,— I hope,— that it's a darned crime, and we'll let it go at that."

"Very well. We will let it go at that."

"Great Scot!" burst from his lips as he whirled in

the fragile chair to face the women of the house. "I just can't help feeling as I do about it. I can't bear to think of Anne,— my pretty sister Anne,—married to that old rummy. Why, she's fit to be the wife of a god. She's the prettiest girl in New York and she'd be one of the best if she had half a chance. A fellow like Braden Thorpe would make a queen of her, and that's just what she ought to be. Oh, Lord! To think of her being married to that burnt-out, shrivelled-up —"

"George! That will do, sir!"

His sister was staring at him in utter perplexity. Something like wonder was growing in her lovely, velvety eyes. Never before had she heard such words as these from the lips of her big and hitherto far from considerate brother, the brother who had always begrudged her the slightest sign of favour from their mother, who had blamed her for securing by unfair means more than her share of the maternal peace-offerings.

Suddenly the big boy dug his knuckles into his eyes and turned away, muttering an oath of mortification. Anne sprang to his side. Her hands fell upon his shoulders.

"What are you doing, George? Are — are you crazy?"

"Crazy *nothing*," he choked out, biting his lip. "Go away, Anne. I'm just a damned fool, that's all. I —"

"Mother, he's — he's crying," whispered Anne, bewildered. "What is it, George?" For the first time in her life she slipped an affectionate arm about him and laid her cheek against his sleek, black hair. "Buck up, little boy; don't take it like this. I'll — I'll be all right. I'll — oh, I'll never forget you for feeling as you do, George. I didn't think you'd really care so much."

"Why,— why, Anne, of course I care," he gulped.

"Why shouldn't I care? Aren't you my sister, and I your brother? I'd be a fine mess of a thing if I didn't care. I tell you, mother, it's awful! You know it is! It is a queer thing for a brother to say, I suppose, but — but I *do* love Anne. All my life I've looked upon her as the finest thing in the world. I've been mean and nasty and all that sort of thing and I'm always saying rotten things to her, but, darn it, I — I do love my pretty sister. I ought to hate you, Anne, for this infernal thing you are determined to do — I ought to, do you understand, but I can't, I just can't. It's the rottenest thing a girl can do, and you're doing it. I — oh, say, what's the matter with me? Sniffling idiot! I say, where the devil *do* you keep your pen?" Wrathfully he jerked a pile of note paper and blotters off the desk, scattering them on the floor. "I'll write the check, mother, and I'll promise to do my best hereafter about Anne and old Tempy. And what's more, I'll not punch Percy's nose, so you needn't be afraid he'll turn it up at us."

The pen scratched vigorously across the check. His mother was regarding him with a queer expression in her eyes. She had not moved while he was expressing himself so feelingly about Anne. Was it possible that after all there was something fine in this boy of hers? His simple, genuine outburst was a revelation to her.

"I trust this may be the last time that you will come to me for money in this way, George," she said levelly. "You must be made to realise that I cannot afford such luxuries as these. You have made it impossible for me to refuse you this time. I cannot allow a son of mine to be in debt to a Wintermill. You must not borrow money. You —"

He looked up, grinning. "There you go again with

that middle-class word, mother. But I'll forgive you this once on condition that you never use it again. People in our walk of life never *borrow* anything but trouble, you know. We don't borrow money. We arrange for it occasionally, but God forbid that we should ever become so common as to borrow it. There you are, filled in and ready for your autograph — payable to Percy Reginald Van Alstone Wintermill. I put his whole name in so that he'd have to go to the exertion of signing it all on the back. He hates work worse than poison. I'm glad you didn't accept him, Anne. It would be awful to have to look up to a man who is so insignificant that you'd have to look down upon him at the same time."

Mrs. Tresslyn signed the check. "I will have Rawson post it to him at once," she said. "There goes one of your gowns, Anne,— five hundred and sixty-five dollars."

"I shan't miss it, mother dear," said Anne cheerfully. She had linked an arm through one of George's, much to the surprise and embarrassment of the tall young man.

"Bully girl," said he awkwardly. "Just for that I'll kiss the bride next month, and wish her the best of luck. I—I certainly hope you'll have better luck than I had."

"There's still loads of luck ahead for you, George," said she, a little wistfully. "All you've got to do is to keep a sharp lookout and you'll find it some day — sooner than I, I'm sure. You'll find the right girl and —zip! Everything will be rosy, old boy!"

He smiled wryly. "I've lost the right girl, Anne."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Tresslyn sharply. Her eyes narrowed as she looked into his. "You ought to

get down on your knees and thank God that you are not married to that —"

"Wait a second, mother," he broke in. "I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to let her alone, now that you're rid of her, just as I'm expected to let old Tempy slide by without noticing him."

"Nonsense," again said Mrs. Tresslyn, but this time with less confidence in her voice. She looked intently into her son's set face and fear was revived in her soul, an ever-present fear that slept and roused itself with sickening persistency.

"We'll hang her up in the family closet, if you don't mind, alongside of Brady Thorpe, and we'll never mention her again if I can help it. I must say, though, that our skeletons are uncommonly attractive, aren't they, Anne? No dry, rattling bones in our closets, are there?" He squeezed her arm playfully, and was amazed when she jerked it away.

"I was nice to you, George, and this is the way you —"

"Forgive me, please. I didn't mean it in an offensive way. I just took it for granted that we'd understand each other. At any rate, we've got one thing to be thankful for. There are no Wintermill skeletons hanging in our closets. We've both succeeded in dodging them, praise the Lord."

It so happened that Percy's excessively homely sister had been considered at one time as a most desirable helpmate for the rapidly developing George, and it is barely possible that the little mustard girl upset a social dynasty.

CHAPTER VI

MR. THORPE was as good as his word. He arranged for the meeting between Braden and Anne, but with characteristic astuteness laid his plans so that they were to come upon each other unexpectedly. It happened on the second day after his talk with Braden.

Mr. Thorpe's plan involved other people as well as the two most vitally interested. There was to be a meeting at his house late in the afternoon for the purpose of signing the antenuptial contract already agreed upon. Five o'clock was the hour set for the gathering. Lawyers representing both parties were to be there, with Mrs. Tresslyn, George and Anne, and Mr. Thorpe's private secretary, who, with Dr. Bates, was to serve as a witness to the instrument.

At noon Wade delivered a letter to Miss Tresslyn in which Mr. Thorpe said that he would be pleased if she would accompany him to Tiffany's for the purpose of selecting a string of pearls. He made it quite clear that she was to go alone with him, playfully mentioning his desire to be the only witness to her confusion when confronted by the "obsequious salesman and his baubles from the sea." If quite agreeable to her he would make an appointment with the jeweller for 3.30 and would call for her in person. After that, he continued, the signing of a contract for life would not seem such a portentous undertaking, and they could go to the meeting with hearts as light as air. It was a cheerful, even gay little missive, but she was not for

an instant blind to the irony that lay between the lines.

Anne selected the pearls that he had chosen in advance of their visit to Tiffany's. He did not tell her that he had instructed the jeweller to make up a string of pearls for her inspection, with the understanding that she was to choose for herself from an assortment of half-a-dozen beautiful offerings, no price to be mentioned. He was quite sure that she would not even consider the cost. He credited her with an honest scorn for sentimentality; she would make no effort to glorify him for an act that was so obviously a part of their unsentimental compact. There would be no gushing over this sardonic tribute to her avarice. She would have herself too well in hand for that.

They were about her neck when she entered the house near Washington Square almost an hour before the time appointed for the conference. In her secret but subdued pleasure over acquiring the costly present, she had lost all count of time. That was a part of Mr. Thorpe's expensive programme.

All the way down in the automobile she had been estimating the value of her new possession. On one point she was satisfied: there were few handsomer strings in New York than hers. She would have to keep them in a safe place,— a vault, no doubt. Nearly every matron of her acquaintance made a great deal of the fact that she had to buy a safe in which to store her treasures. There was something agreeable — subtly agreeable — in owning jewels that would have to be kept in one of those staunch, opulent looking safes. She experienced a thrill of satisfaction by describing herself in advance, as one of the women with pearls. And there was additional gratification in the knowledge that she could hardly be called a matron in

the strict sense of the word. She was glad that she was too young for that. She tried to recall the names of all the women who possessed pearls like these, and the apparent though undeclared age of each. There was not one among them who was under forty. Most of them had endured many years of married life before acquiring what she was to have at the outset. Mrs. Wintermill, for instance: she was sixty-two or three, and had but recently come into a string of pearls not a whit more valuable than the one that now adorned her neck and lay hidden beneath the warm fur collar of her coat.

Her calculations suddenly hit upon something that could be used as a basis. Mrs. Wintermill's pearls had cost sixty-five thousand dollars. Sixty-five thousand dollars! She could not resist the impulse to shoot a swift, startled look out of the corners of her eyes at the silent old man beside her. That was a lot of money! And it was money that he was under no obligation to expend upon her. It was quite outside the contract. She was puzzled. Why this uncalled for generosity? A queer, sickening doubt assailed her.

"Are — are these pearls really and truly to be mine?" she asked. "Mine to keep forever?"

"Certainly, my dear," he said, looking at her so oddly that she flushed. He had read the thought that was in her mind. "I give and bequeath them to you this day, to have and to hold forever," he added, with a smile that she could not fail to understand.

"I wanted to be sure," she said, resorting to frankness.

When they entered the Thorpe home, Wade was waiting in the hall with the butler. His patient, set smile did not depart so much as the fraction of an inch

from its habitual condition. His head was cocked a little to one side.

"Are we late, Wade?" inquired Mr. Thorpe.

"No, sir," said Wade. "No one has come." He glanced up at the tall clock on the landing. "It is a quarter past four, sir. Mrs. Tresslyn telephoned a few minutes ago, sir."

"Ah! That she would be late?"

"No, sir. To inquire if — ahem! — if Mr. Braden was likely to be here this afternoon."

Anne started violently. A quick, hunted expression leaped into her eyes as she looked about her. Something rushed up into her throat, something that smothered.

"You informed her, of course, that Mr. Braden declines to honour us with his presence," said Mr. Thorpe suavely.

"Yes, sir, in a way."

"Ahem! Well, my dear, make yourself quite at home. Go into the library, do. You'll find a roaring fire there. Murray, take Miss Tresslyn's coat. Make her comfortable. Come, Wade, your arm. Forgive me, Anne, if I leave you to yourself for a few minutes. My joy at having you here is shorn of its keenness by a long-established age that demands house-boots, an eider-down coat and — Murray, what the devil do you mean by letting the house get so cold as all this? It's like a barn. Are the furnaces out. What am I paying that rascally O'Toole for? Tell him to — "

"It is quite comfortable, Mr. Thorpe," said Anne, with a slight shiver that was not to be charged to the defective O'Toole.

The long, wide hall was dark and grim. Wade was dark and grim, and Murray too, despite his rotundity.

There were lank shadows at the bottom of the hall, grim projections of objects that stood for ornamentation: a suit of armour, a gloomy candlestick of prodigious stature, and a thin Italian cabinet surmounted by an urn whose unexposed contents might readily have suggested something more sinister than the dust of antiquity. The door to the library was open. Fitful red shadows flashed dully from the fireplace across the room, creeping out into the hall and then darting back again as if afraid to venture. The waning sunlight struggled through a curtained window at the top of the stairs. There was dusk in the house. Evening had fallen there.

Anne stood in the middle of the library, divested of her warm fur coat. Murray was poking the fire, and cheerful flames were leaping upward in response to the call to wake. She had removed one of her gloves. With the slim, bared fingers she fondled the pearls about her neck, but her thoughts were not of baubles. She was thinking of this huge room full of shadows, shadows through which she would have to walk for many a day, where night would always be welcome because of the light it demanded.

It was a man's room. Everything in it was massive, substantial. Big chairs, wide lounges, and a thick soft carpet of dull red that deprived the footfall of its sound. Books mounted high,— almost to the ceiling, —filling all the spaces left unused by the doors and windows. Heavy damask curtains shut out the light of day. She wondered why they had been drawn so early, and whether they were always drawn like this. Near the big fireplace, with its long mantelpiece over which hung suspended the portrait of an early Knickerbocker gentleman with ruddy, even convivial coun-

tenance, stood a long table, a reading lamp at the farther end. Books, magazines, papers lay in disorder upon this table.

She recalled something that Braden once had told her: his grandfather always "raised Cain" with any one who happened to be guilty of what he called criminal orderliness in putting the table to rights. He wanted the papers and magazines left just as they were, so that he could put his hand upon them without demanding too much of a servant's powers of divination. More than one parlour-maid had been dismissed for offensive neatness.

She closed her eyes for a second. A faint line, as of pain, appeared between them. In this room Braden Thorpe had been coddled and scolded, in this room he had romped and studied — She opened her eyes quickly.

"Murray," she said, in a low voice; "you are quite sure that Mr. Braden is — is out?"

The old butler straightened up from his task, his hand going to his back as if to keep it from creaking. "Yes, Miss Tresslyn, quite sure." He hesitated for a moment. "I think he said that he intended to give himself the pleasure of a call — ahem! I beg pardon. Yes, he is quite out — I should say, I'm quite sure he is out." He was confused, a most unheard of thing in Murray.

"But he will return — soon?" She took a step or two nearer the door, possessed of a sudden impulse to run,— to run swiftly away.

"I think not, miss," said he. "He is not expected to be here during the — er — you might say, the — ahem!"

"I'll have a look about the room," said Anne softly.

She felt that she was going to like Murray. She wanted him to like her. The butler may have caught the queer little note in her voice, or he may have seen the hunted look in her eyes before she turned them away. At any rate, he poked the fire vigorously once more. It was his way of saying that she might depend upon him. Then he went out of the room, closing the door behind him.

She started violently, and put her hand to her heart. She had the queer, uncanny feeling that she was locked in this sombre room, that she would never be free again.

In a room upstairs, Mr. Templeton Thorpe was saying to Wade:

"Is my grandson in his room?"

"Yes, sir. He came in at four and has been waiting for you, as you directed, sir."

"Tell him that I would like to see him at once in the library," said Mr. Thorpe.

"Yes, sir," said Wade, and for the first time in years his patient smile assumed the proportions of a grin. He did not have to be told that Anne's presence in the house was not to be made known to Braden. All that he was expected to do was to inform the young man that his grandfather wanted to see him in the library, — at once.

And so it came to pass that three minutes later, Braden and Anne were face to face with each other, and old Mr. Thorpe had redeemed his promise.

Of the two, Braden was the more surprised. The girl's misgivings had prepared her for just such a crisis as this. Something told her the instant she set foot inside the house that she was to be tricked. In a flash she realised that Mr. Thorpe himself was re-

sponsible for the encounter she had dreaded. It was impossible to suspect Braden of being a party to the scheme. He was petrified. There could be no doubt that he had been tricked quite as cleverly as she.

But what could have been in the old man's design? Was it a trap? Did he expect her to rush into Braden's arms? Was he lurking behind some near-by curtain to witness her surrender? Was he putting her to the test, or was it his grandson who was on trial?

Here was the supreme crisis in the life of Anne Tresslyn: the turning point. Her whole being cried out against this crafty trick. One word now from Braden would have altered the whole course of her life. In eager silence she stood on the thin edge of circumstance, ready to fall as the wind blew strongest. She was in revolt. If this stupefied, white-faced young man had but called out to her: "Anne! Anne, my darling! Come!" she would have laughed in triumph over the outcome of the old man's test, and all the years of her life would have been filled with sweetness. She would have gone to him.

But, alas, those were not the words that fell from his lips, and the fate of Anne Tresslyn was sealed as she stood there watching him with wide-spread eyes.

"I prefer to see you in your own home," he said, a flush of anger spreading over his face; "not here in my grandfather's house."

There was no mistaking his meaning. He thought she had come there to see him, — ay, conceivably had planned this very situation! She started. It was like a slap in the face. Then she breathed once more, and realised that she had not drawn a breath since he entered the room. Her life had been standing still, waiting till these few stupendous seconds were over. Now

they were gone and she could take up life where it had left off. The tightness in her throat relaxed. The crisis was over, the turning point was behind her. He had failed her, and he would have to pay. He would have to pay with months, even years of waiting. For it had never occurred to Anne Tresslyn to doubt that he would come to her in good and proper time!

She could not speak at once. Her response was not ready. She was collecting herself. Given the time, she would rise above the mischief that confounded her. To have uttered the words that hung unuttered on her lips would have glorified him and brought shame to her pride forever more. Five words trembled there awaiting deliverance and they were good and honest words — "Take me back, Braden darling!" They were never spoken. They were formed to answer a different call from him. She checked them in time.

"I did not come here to see you," she said at last, standing very straight beside the table. He was just inside the door leading to the hall. "Whose trick is this, — yours or Mr. Thorpe's?"

Enlightenment flashed into his eyes. "By Jove!" he exclaimed. "He said he would do it, and he has made good. This is his way of — " He broke off in the middle of the sentence. In an instant he had whirled about and the door was closed with a bang.

She started forward, her hand pressed to her quick-beating heart, real fear in her eyes. What was in his mind? Was this insanity? She had read of men driven mad by disappointment who brutally set upon and killed — But he was facing her now, and she stopped short. His jaw was set but there was no insane light in the eyes that regarded her so steadily. Somehow — and suddenly — her composure was re-

stored. She was not afraid of him. She was not afraid of the hands and arms that had caressed her so tenderly, nor was she afraid of the words that were to fall from the lips that had kissed hers so many times. He was merely going to plead with her, and she was well prepared for that.

For weeks and weeks she had been preparing herself for this unhappy moment. She knew that the time would come when she would have to face him and defend herself. She would have to deny the man she loved. She would have to tell him that she was going for a higher price than he could pay. The time had come and she was ready. The weakness of the minute before had passed — passed with his failure to strike when, with all her heart and soul, she wanted him to strike.

"You need not be frightened," he said, subduing his voice with an effort. "Let us take time to steady ourselves. We have a good deal to say to each other. Let's be careful not to waste words, now that we're face to face at last."

"I am quite calm," she said, stockstill beside the table. "Why should I be frightened? I am the last person in the world that you would strike, Braden." She was that sure of him!

"Strike? Good God, why should that have entered your head?"

"One never knows," she said. "I was startled. I was afraid — at first. You implied a moment ago that I had arranged for this meeting. Surely you understand that I —"

"My grandfather arranged it," he interrupted. "There's no use beating about the bush. I told him that I would not believe this thing of you unless I had it from your own lips. You would not see me. You

were not permitted to see me. I told him that you were being forced into this horrible marriage, that your mother was afraid to let me have a single word with you. He laughed at me. He said that you were going into it with your eyes open, that you were obeying your mother willingly, that you — "

"Pardon me," she interrupted coldly. "Is your grandfather secreted somewhere near so that he may be able to enjoy the — "

"I don't know, and I don't care. Let him hear if he wants to. Why should either of us care? He knows all there is to know about you and he certainly appreciates my position. We may as well speak freely. It will not make the slightest difference, one way or the other, so far as he is concerned. He knows perfectly well that you are not marrying him for love, or respect, or even position. So let's speak plainly. I say that he arranged this meeting between us. He brought you here, and he sent upstairs for me to join him in this room. Well, you see he isn't here. We are quite alone. He is fair to both of us. He is giving me my chance and he is giving you yours. It only remains for us to settle the matter here and now. I know all of the details of this disgusting compact. I know that you are to have two million dollars settled upon you the day you are married — oh, I know the whole of it! Now, there's just one thing to be settled between you and me: are you going ahead with it or are you going to be an honest woman and marry the man you love? "

He did not leave her much to stand upon. She had expected him to go about it in an entirely different way. She had counted upon an impassioned plea for himself, not this terse, cold-blooded, almost unemo-

tional summing up of the situation. For an instant she was at a loss. It was hard to look into his honest eyes. A queer, unformed doubt began to torment her, a doubt that grew into a question later on: was he still in love with her?

"And what if I do not care to discuss my private affairs with you?" she said, playing for time.

"Don't fence, Anne," he said sternly. "Answer the question. Wait. I'll put it in another form, and I want the truth. If you say to me that your mother is deliberately forcing you into this marriage I'll believe you, and I'll — I'll fight for you till I get you. I will not stand by and see you sacrificed, even though you may appear to — "

"Stop, please. If you mean to ask *that* question, I'll answer it in advance. It is I, not my mother, who expects to marry Mr. Thorpe, and I am quite old enough and wise enough to know my own mind. So you need not put the question."

He drew nearer. The table separated them as they looked squarely into each other's eyes through the fire-lit space that lay between.

"Anne, Anne!" he cried hoarsely. "You must not, you shall not do this unspeakable thing! For God's sake, girl, if you have an atom of self-respect, the slightest — "

"Don't begin that, Braden!" she cut in, ominously. "I cannot permit you or any man to *say* such things to me, no matter what you may think. Bear that in mind."

"Don't you mind what I think about it, Anne?" he cried, his voice breaking.

"See here, Braden," she said, in an abrupt, matter-of-fact manner, "it isn't going to do the least bit of

good to argue the point. I am pledged to marry Mr. Thorpe and I shall do so if I live till the twenty-third of next month. Provided, of course, that he lives till that day himself. I have gone into it with my eyes open, as he says, and I am satisfied with my bargain. I suppose you will hate me to the end of your days. But if you think that I expect to hate myself, you are very much mistaken. Look! Do you see these pearls? They were not included in the bargain, and I could have gone on very well without them to the end of my term as the mistress of this house, but I accepted them from my fiancé to-day in precisely the same spirit in which they were given: as alms to the undeserving. Your grandfather did not want me to marry you. He is merely paying me to keep my hands off. That's the long and the short of it. I am not in the least deceived. You will say that I could — and should have told him to go to the devil. Well, I'm sorry to have to tell you that I couldn't see my way clear to doing that. I hope he *is* listening behind the curtains. We drove a hard bargain. He thought he could get off with a million. You must remember that he had deliberately disinherited you, — that much I know. His will is made. It will not be altered. You will be a poor man as wealth is reckoned in these days. But you will be a great man. You will be famous, distinguished, honoured. That is what he intends. He set out to sacrifice me in order that you might be spared. You were not to have a millstone about your neck in the shape of a selfish, unsacrificing wife. What rot! From the bottom of my heart, Braden, — if you will grant me a heart, — I hope and pray that you may go to the head of your profession, that you may be a great and good man. I do not ask you to be-

lieve me when I say that I love you, and always —"

"For God's sake, don't ask me to believe it! Don't add to the degradation you are piling up for yourself. Spare yourself that miserable confession. It is quite unnecessary to lie to me, Anne."

"Lie? I am telling you the truth, Braden. I do love you. I can't help that, can I? You do not for an instant suspect that I love this doddering old man, do you? Well, I must love some one. That's natural, isn't it? Then, why shouldn't it be you? Oh, laugh if you will! It doesn't hurt me in the least. Curse me, if you like. I've made up my mind to go on with this business of marrying. We've had one unsuccessful marriage in our family of late. Love was at the bottom of it. You know how it has turned out, Braden. It — "

"I believe I know how it might have turned out if they had been left to themselves," said he bluntly.

"She would have been a millstone, nevertheless," she argued.

"I don't agree with you. George found his level in that little nobody, as you all have called her. Poor little thing, she was not so lucky as I. She did not have her eyes opened in time. She had no chance to escape. But we're not here to talk about Lutie Carnahan. I have told my grandfather that I intend to break this thing off if it is in my power to do so. I shall not give up until I know that you are actually married. It is a crime that must not — "

"How do you purpose breaking it off?" she inquired shrilly. Visions of a strong figure rising in the middle of the ceremony to cry out against the final words flashed into her mind. Would she have that to look forward to and dread?

"I shall go on appealing to your honour, your decency, your self-respect, if not to the love you say you bear for me."

She breathed easier. "And will you confine your appeals to me?"

"What do you mean?"

"I thought you might take it into your head to appeal to Mr. Thorpe's honour, decency, self-respect and love for you," she said, sullenly. "He is quite as guilty as I, remember."

"He has quite a different object in view. He seems to feel that he is doing me a good turn, not an evil one."

"Bosh!" She was angry. "And what will be your attitude toward me if you *do* succeed in preventing the marriage? Will you take me back as I was before this thing came up? Will you make me your wife, just as if nothing had happened? In view of my deliberate intention to deny you, will you forget everything and take me back?"

He put his hand to his throat, and for a moment appeared to be struggling against himself. "I will take you back, Anne, as if nothing had happened, if you will say to me here and now that you will marry me to-morrow."

She stared at him, incredulous. Her heart began to beat rapidly once more and the anger died away. "You would do that, knowing me to be what I am?"

"Knowing you to be what you *were*," he amended eagerly. "Oh, Anne, you are worth loving, you are pure of heart and —"

"If I will marry you to-morrow?" she went on, watching his face closely.

"Yes. But you must say it now — this instant.

I will not grant you a moment's respite. If you do not say the word now, your chance is gone forever. It has to be now, Anne."

"And if I refuse — what then?"

"I would not marry you if you were the only woman on earth," he said flatly.

She smiled. "Are you sure that you love me, Braden?"

"I will love you when you become what you were, — a month ago," he said simply. "A girl worth the honour of being loved," he added.

"Men sometimes love those who are not worth the honour," she said, feeling her way. "They cannot help themselves."

"Will you say the word *now?*" he demanded hoarsely.

She sighed. It was a sigh of relief, — perhaps of triumph. He was safe for all time. He would come to her in the end. She was on solid ground once more.

"I am afraid, Braden, that I cannot play fast and loose with a man as old as Mr. Thorpe," she said lightly.

He muttered an oath. "Don't be a fool! What do you call your treatment of me? Fast and loose! Good Lord, haven't you played fast and loose with me?"

"Ah, but you are young and enduring," she said. "You will get over it. He wouldn't have the time or strength to recover from the shock of —"

"Oh, for God's sake, don't talk like that! What do you call yourself? What —" He checked the angry words and after a moment went on, more quietly: "Now, see here, Anne, I'm through parleying with you.

I shall go on trying to prevent this marriage, but succeed or fail, I don't want to see your face again as long as I live. I'm through with you. You *are* like your mother. You are a damned vampire. God, how I have loved and trusted you, how I have believed in you. I did not believe that the woman lived who could degrade herself as you are about to degrade yourself. I have had my eyes opened. All my life I have loved you without even knowing you. All my life I —"

"All my life I have loved you," she broke in cringingly.

He laughed aloud. "The hell you have!" he cried out. "You have allowed me to hold you in my arms, to kiss you, to fondle you, and you have trembled with joy and passion, — and now you call it love! Love! You have never loved in your life and you never will. You call self-gratification by the name of love. Thank God, I know you at last. I ought to pity you. In all humanity I ought to pity a fellow creature so devoid of —"

"Stop!" she cried, her face flaming red. "Go! Go away! You have said enough. I will hate you if you utter another word, and I don't want to hate you, Braden. I want to go on loving you all my life. I *must* go on loving you."

"You have my consent," he said, ironically, bowing low before her. "Humanity compels me to grant you all the consolation you can find in deceiving yourself."

"Wait!" she cried out, as he turned toward the door. "I — I am hurt, Braden. Can't you see how you have hurt me? Won't you —"

"Of course, you are hurt!" he shouted. "You squeal when you are hurt. You think only of yourself

when you cry 'I am hurt'! Don't you ever think of any one else?" His hand grasped the big silver door-knob.

"I want you to understand, if you can, why I am doing this thing you revile me for."

"I understand," he said curtly.

She hurried her words, fearful that he might rush from the room before she could utter the belated explanation.

"I don't want to be poor. I don't want to go through life as my mother has gone, always fighting for the things she most desired, always being behind the game she was forced to play. You can't understand, — you are too big and fine, — you cannot understand the little things, Braden. I want love and happiness, but I want the other, too. Don't you see that with all this money at my command I can be independent, I can be safe for all time, I can give more than myself in return for the love that I must have? Don't you understand why —"

She was quite close to him when he interrupted the impassioned appeal. His hand shook as he held it up to check her approach.

"It's all over, Anne. There is nothing more to be said. I understand everything now. May God forgive you," he said huskily.

She stopped short. Her head went up and defiance shone in her face.

"I'd rather have your forgiveness than God's," she said distinctly, "and since I may not ask for it now, I will wait for it, my friend. We love each other. Time mends a good many breaks. Good-bye! Some day I hope you'll come to see your poor old granny, and bring —"

"Oh, for the love of heaven, have a little decency, Anne," he cried, his lip curling.

But her pride was roused, it was in revolt against all of the finer instincts that struggled for expression.

"You'd better go now. Run upstairs and tell your grandfather that his scheme worked perfectly. Tell him everything I have said. He will not mind. I am sorry you will not remain to see the contract signed. I should like to have you for a witness. If you —"

"Contract? What contract?"

"Oh," she said lightly, "just a little agreement on his part to make life endurable for me while he continues to live. We are to sign the paper at five o'clock. Yes, you'd better run along, Braden, or you'll find yourself the centre of a perplexed crowd. Before you go, please take a last look at me in my sepulchre. Here I stand! Am I not fair to look upon?"

"God, I'd sooner see you in your grave than here," he grated out. "You'd be better off, a thousand times."

"This is my grave," she said, "or will be soon. I suppose I am not to count you among the mourners?"

He slammed the door behind him, and she was alone.

"How I hate people who slam doors," she said to herself.

CHAPTER VII

A FORTNIGHT passed. Preparations for the wedding went on in the Tresslyn home with little or no slackening of the tension that had settled upon the inmates with the advent of the disturber. Anne was now sullenly determined that nothing should intervene to prevent the marriage, unless an unkind Providence ordered the death of Templeton Thorpe. She was bitter toward Braden. Down in her soul, she knew that he was justified in the stand he had taken, and in that knowledge lay the secret of her revolt against one of the commands of Nature. He had treated her with the scorn that she knew she deserved; he had pronounced judgment upon her, and she confessed to herself that she was guilty as charged. That was the worst of it; she could pronounce herself guilty, and yet resent the justice of her own decision.

In her desperation, she tried to hold old Mr. Thorpe responsible for the fresh canker that gnawed at her soul. But for that encounter in his library, she might have proceeded with confidence instead of the uneasiness that now attended her every step. She could not free herself of the fear that Braden might after all succeed in his efforts to persuade the old man to change his mind. True, the contract was signed, but contracts are not always sacred. They are made to be broken. Moreover, by no stretch of the imagination could this contract be looked upon as sacred and it certainly would not look pretty if exposed to a court of law. Her sole thought now was to have it all safely over with. Then perhaps she could smile once more.

In the home of the bridegroom, preparations for the event were scant and of a perfunctory nature. Mr. Templeton Thorpe ordered a new suit of clothes for himself — or, to be quite precise, he instructed Wade to order it. He was in need of a new suit anyway, he said, and he had put off ordering it for a long, long time, not because he was parsimonious but because he did not like going up town for the "try-on." He also had a new silk hat made from his special block, and he would doubtless be compelled to have his hair trimmed up a bit about the nineteenth or twentieth, if the weather turned a trifle warmer. Of course, there would be the trip to City Hall with Anne, for the licence. He would have to attend to that in person. That was one thing that Wade couldn't do for him. Wade bought the wedding-ring and saw to the engraving; he attended to the buying of a gift for the best man, — who under one of the phases of an all-enveloping irony was to be George Dexter Tresslyn! — and in the same expedition to the jewellers' purchased for himself a watch-fob as a self-selected gift from a master who had never given him anything in all his years of service except his monthly wage and a daily malediction.

Braden Thorpe made the supreme effort to save his grandfather. Believing himself to be completely cured of his desire for Anne, he took the stand that there was no longer a necessity for the old gentleman to sacrifice himself to the greed of the Tresslyns. But Mr. Thorpe refused to listen to this new and apparently unprejudiced argument. He was firm in his determination to clip Anne's claws; he would take no chances with youth, ultimate propinquity, and the wiles of a repentant sinner.

"You can guard against anything," said he in his

wisdom, "except the beautiful woman who repents. You never can tell what she'll do to make her repentance satisfactory to everybody concerned. So we'll take no chances with Anne. We'll put her in irons, my boy, so to speak."

And so it was that Braden, worn and disspirited, gave up in despair and prepared for his return to London. He went before an examining board in New York first and obtained his licence to become a practising physician and surgeon, and, with a set expression in his disillusioned eyes, peered out into the future in quest of the fame that was to take the place of a young girl's love.

He met his first patient in the Knickerbocker Café. Lunching alone there one day, a week before the date selected for sailing, he was accosted by an extremely gay and pretty young woman who came over from a table of four in a distant corner of the room.

"Is this Dr. Braden Thorpe?" she inquired, placing her hands on the back of the chair opposite and leaning forward with a most agreeable, even inviting smile.

Her face was familiar. "Since day before yesterday," he replied, rising with a self-conscious flush.

"May I sit down? I want to talk to you about myself." She sat down in the chair that an alert waiter pulled out for her.

"I am afraid you are labouring under a misapprehension," he said. "I — I am not what you would call a practising physician as yet."

"Aren't you looking for patients?" she inquired. "Sit down, please."

"I haven't even an office, so why should I feel that I am entitled to a patient?" he said. "You see, I've

just got my licence to practice. As things go, I shouldn't have a client for at least two years. Are you looking for a doctor?"

"I saw by the papers this morning that the grandson of Mr. Templeton Thorpe was a regular doctor. One of my friends over there pointed you out to me. What is your fee for an appendicitis operation, Dr. Thorpe?"

"Good — ahem! I beg your pardon. You really startled me. I —"

"Oh, that's all right. I quite understand. Hard to grasp at first, isn't it? Well, I've got to have my appendix out sooner or later. It's been bothering me for a year, off and on. Everybody tells me I ought to have it out sometime when it isn't bothering me and —"

"But, my dear young lady, I'm not the man you want. You ought to go to some —"

"You'll do just as well as any one, I'm sure. It's no trick to take out an appendix in these days. The fewer a doctor has snipped off, the less he charges, don't you know. So why shouldn't I, being quite poor, take advantage of your ignorance? The most intelligent surgeon in New York couldn't do any more than to snip it off, now could he? And he wouldn't be one-tenth as ignorant as you are about prices."

She was so gay and naïve about it that he curbed his amazement, and, to some extent, his embarrassment.

"I suppose that it is also ignorance on my part that supplies me with office hours in a public restaurant from one to three o'clock," he said, with a very unprofessional grin.

"What hospital do you work in?" she demanded, in a business-like tone.

Humouring her, he mentioned one of the big hospitals in which he had served as an interne.

"That suits me," she said. "Can you do it tomorrow?"

"For heaven's sake, madam, I — are you in earnest?"

"Absolutely. I want to have it done right away. You see, I do a good deal of dancing, and — now, listen!" She leaned farther across the table, a serious little line appearing between her brows. "I want you to do it because I've always heard that you are one of the most earnest, capable and ambitious young men in the business. I'd sooner trust you than any one else, Dr. Thorpe. It has to be done by some one, so if I'm willing to take a chance with you, why shouldn't you take one with me?"

"I have been in Europe for nearly three years. How could you possibly have heard all this about me?"

"See that fellow over there facing us? The funny little chap with the baby moustache? He —"

"Why, it's Simmy Dodge," cried Braden. "Are — are you —"

"Just a friend, that's all. He's one of the finest chaps in New York. He's a gentleman. That's Mr. and Mrs. Rumsey Fenn, — the other two, I mean. You can't see them for the florist shop in between. They know you too, so —"

"May I inquire why one of my friends did not bring you over and introduce me to you, Miss — er —"

"Miss, in a sort of way, Doctor, but still a Missus," she said amiably. "Well, I told them that I knew you quite well and I wouldn't let them come over. It's all right, though. We'll be partially related to each other by marriage before long, I understand; so it's

all right. You see, I am Mrs. George Dexter Tresslyn."

"You — you are?" he gasped. "By Jove, I thought that your face was familiar. I —"

"One of the best advertised faces in New York about two years ago," she said, and he detected a plaintive note in the flippant remark. "Not so well-known nowadays, thank God. See here, Dr. Thorpe, I hope you won't think it out of place for me to congratulate you."

"Congratulate me? My dear Mrs. Tresslyn, it is not I who am to be married. You confuse me with —"

"I'm congratulating you because you're not the one," said she, her eyes narrowing. "Bless your soul, I know what I'm talking about. But say no more. Let's get back to the appendix. Will you do the job for me?"

"Now that we are acquainted with each other," he said, suppressing a natural excitement, "may we not go over and join Simmy and the Fenns? Don't you think you'd better consult with them before irrevocably committing yourself to me?"

"Fine! We'll talk it over together, the whole lot of us. But, I say, don't forget that I've known you for years — through the family, of course. I want to thank you first for one thing, Dr. Thorpe. George used to tell me how you took my part in the — the smash-up. He said you wrote to him from Europe to be a man and stand by me in spite of everything. That's really what I've been wanting to say to you, more than the other. Still, I've got to have it out, so come on. Let's set a day. Mrs. Fenn will go up to the hospital with me. She's used to hospitals. Says she loves them. She's trying her best to have

Mr. Fenn go in next week to have his out. She's had five operations and a baby. I'm awfully glad to know you, Dr. Thorpe. I've always wanted to. I'd like better than anything I know of to be your first regular patient. It will always be something to boast about in years to come. It will be splendid to say to people, 'Oh, yes, I am the first person that ever had her appendix removed by the celebrated Dr. Thorpe.' It will —"

"But I have removed a great many," he said, carried away by her sprightly good humour. "In my training days, so to speak."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that," she cried, disappointed. Then her face brightened: "Still, I suppose you had to learn just where the thing is. It wouldn't do to go about stabbing people in the wrong place, just as if the appendix might be any little old where, would it?"

"I should say not," said he, arising and bowing very profoundly. Then he followed close behind her trim, smart figure as they threaded their way among the tables.

So this was the "pretty little mustard girl" that all fashionable New York had talked about in the past and was dancing with in the present. This was the girl who refused to go to the dogs at the earnest behest of the redoubtable Mrs. Tresslyn. Somehow he felt that Fate had provided him with an unexpected pal!

And, to his utter astonishment, he was prevailed upon to perform the operation! The Fenns and Simeon Dodge decided the matter for him.

"I shall have to give up sailing next week," he said, as pleased as Punch but contriving to project a wry

face. "I can't go away and leave my first bona-fide patient until she is entirely out of the woods."

"I have engagements for to-morrow and Wednesday," said Mrs. Rumsey Fenn, after reflection. She was a rather pallid woman of thirty-five who might have been accused of being bored with life if she had not made so many successful efforts to prolong it.

"It doesn't happen to be your appendix, my dear," said her husband.

"Goodness, I wish it were," said she, regretfully. "What I mean is that I can't go to the hospital with Lutie before, — let me see, — before Thursday. Can you wait that long, dear?"

"Ask Dr. Thorpe," said young Mrs. Tresslyn. "He is my doctor, you know."

"Of course, you all understand that I cannot go ahead and perform an operation without first determining —"

"Don't you worry," said the patient. "My physician has been after me for a year to have it out. He'll back me up. I'll telephone him as soon as I get back home, and I'll have him call you up, Dr. Thorpe. Thanks ever so much. And, before I forget it, what is the fee to be? You see, I pay my own bills, so I've got to know the — the worst."

"My fee will be even more reasonable than you hope, Mrs. Tresslyn," said Braden, smiling. "Just guess at the amount you'd feel able to pay and then divide it by two, and you'll have it."

"Dear me," cried Mrs. Fenn, "how perfectly satisfactory! Rumsey, you *must* have yours out this week. You're always talking about not being able to afford things, and here's a chance to save money in a way you never would have suspected."

"Good Lord, Madge," exclaimed her husband, "I've never had a pain in my life. I wish you wouldn't keep nagging at me all the time to have an operation performed, whether I need it or not. Let my appendix alone. It's always treated me with extreme loyalty and respect, so why the deuce should I turn upon the poor thing and assassinate it?"

"See here, Rumsey," said Simmy Dodge sagely, "if I were in your place I'd have a perfectly sound tooth pulled some time, just to keep it from aching when you're an old man. Or you might have your left leg amputated so that it couldn't be crushed in a railroad accident. You ought to do something to please Madge, old chap. She's been a thoughtful, devoted wife to you for twelve or thirteen years, and what have you ever done to please her? Nothing! You've never so much as had a crick in your neck or a pain that you couldn't account for, so do be generous, Rumsey. Besides, maybe you haven't got an appendix at all. Just think how you could crow over her if they couldn't find one, even after the most careful and relentless search over your entire system."

"She's always wanting me to die or something like that," growled Fenn; "but when I talked of going to the Spanish War she went into hysterics."

"We'd only been married a month, Rumsey," said his wife reproachfully.

"But how could I have known that war was to be declared so soon?" he demanded.

Braden and Simeon Dodge left the restaurant together. They were old friends, college-mates, and of the same age. Dodge had gone into the law-school after his academic course, and Thorpe into the medical college. Their ways did not part, however. Both

were looked upon as heirs to huge fortunes, and to both was offered the rather doubtful popularity that usually is granted to affluence. Thorpe accepted his share with the caution of the wise man, while Dodge, not a whit less capable, took his as a philanderer. He now had an office in a big down-town building, but he never went near it except when his partner took it into his head to go away for a month's vacation at the slack season of the year. At such periods Mr. Dodge, being ages younger than the junior member of the firm, made it his practice to go down to the office and attend to the business with an earnestness that surprised every one. He gave over frolicking and stuck resolutely to the "knitting" that Johnson had left behind. Possessed of a natural though thrifty intelligence, — one that wasted little in public, — and a latent energy that could lift him occasionally above a perfectly normal laziness, he made as much of his opportunities as one could expect of a young man who has two hundred thousand a year and an amiable disposition.

No one in the city was more popular than Simmy Dodge, and no one more deservedly so, for his bad qualities were never so bad that one need hesitate about calling him a good fellow. His habits were easy but genteel. When intoxicated he never smashed things, and when sober, — which was his common condition, — he took extremely good care of other people's reputations. Women liked him, which should not be surprising; and men liked him because he was not to be spoiled by the women who liked him, which is saying a great deal for an indolent young man with money. He had a smile that always appeared at its best in the morning, and survived the day with amazing endurance. And that also is saying a great deal for a

young man who is favoured by both sexes and a supposedly neutral Dame Fortune at the same time. He had broken many of the laws of man and some of those imposed by God, but he always paid without apology. He was inevitably pardoned by man and paroled by his Maker, — which is as much as to say that he led a pretty decent sort of existence and enjoyed exceedingly good health.

He really wasn't much to look at. Being a trifle under medium height, weighing less than one hundred and twenty pounds stripped, as wiry as a cat and as indefatigable as a Scotch terrier, and with an abnormally large pair of ears that stood out like oyster shells from the sides of a round, sleek head, he made no pretentions to physical splendour, — unless, by chance, you would call the perky little straw-coloured moustache that adorned his long upper lip a tribute to vanity. His eyes were blue and merry and set wide apart under a bulging, intellectual looking forehead, and his teeth were large and as white as snow. When he laughed the world laughed with him, and when he tried to appear downcast the laughter went on just the same, for then he was more amusing than ever.

"I didn't know you were a friend of hers," said he as they stood in front of the hotel waiting for the taxi that was to take Thorpe to a hospital.

Thorpe remembered the admonition. "I tried to put a little back-bone into George Tresslyn at the time of the rumpus, if that's what you'd call being a friend to her," he said evasively.

"She's a nice little girl," said Simmy, "and she's been darned badly treated. Mrs. Tresslyn has never gotten over the fact that Lutie made her pay handsomely to get the noble Georgie back into the smart set.

Plucky little beggar, too. Lot of people like the Fenns and the Roush girls have taken her up, primarily, I suppose, because the Tresslyns threw her down. She's making good with them, too, after a fashion all her own. Must be something fine in a girl like that, Brady, — I mean something worth while. Straight as a string, and a long way from being a disgrace to the name of Tresslyn. Quaint, isn't she?"

"Amazingly so. I think George would marry her all over again if she'd have him, mother or no mother."

"Well, she's quaint in another respect," said Dodge. "She still considers herself to be George Tresslyn's wife."

"Religion?"

"Not a bit of it. She just says she is, that's all, and what God joined together no woman can put asunder. She means Mrs. Tresslyn, of course. By the way, Brady, I wonder if I'm still enough of a pal to be allowed to say something to you." The blue eyes were serious and there was a sort of caressing note in his voice.

"We've always been pals, Simmy."

"Well, it's just this: I'm darned sorry things have turned out as they have for you. It's a rotten shame. Why don't you choke that old grandparent of yours? Put him out of his misery. Anne has told me of your diabolical designs upon the hopelessly afflicted. She used to talk about it for hours while you were in London, — and I had to listen with shivers running up and down my back all the time. Nobody on earth could blame you for putting the quietus on old Templeton Thorpe. He is about as hopelessly afflicted as any one I know, — begging your pardon for treading on the family toes."

"He's quite sane, Simmy," said Braden, with a smile that was meant to be pleasant but fell short of the mark.

"He's an infernal old traitor, then," said Simmy hotly. "I wouldn't treat a dog as he has treated you, — no kind of a dog, mind you. Not even a Pekinese, and I hate 'em worse than snakes. What the devil does Anne mean? Lordy, Lordy, man, she's always been in love with you. She — but, forgive me, old chap, I oughtn't to run on like this. I didn't mean to open a sore —"

"It's all right, Simmy. I understand. Thanks, old boy. It was a pretty stiff blow, but — well, I'm still on my pins, as you see."

Dodge was hanging onto the door of the taxi, impeding his friend's departure. "She's too fine a girl to be doing a rotten thing like this. I don't mind telling you I've always been in — er — that is, I've always had a tender spot for Anne. I suppose you know that?"

"I know that, Simmy."

"Hang it all, I never dreamed that she'd look at any one else but you, so I never even peeped a word to her about my own feelings. And here she goes, throwing you over like a shot, and spilling everything. Confound it, man, if I'd thought she could possibly want to marry anybody else but you, I'd have had my try. The good Lord knows I'm not much, but by thunder, I'm not decrepit. I — I suppose it was the money, eh?"

"That's for you to say, Simmy; certainly not for me."

"If it's money she's after and not an Adonis, I don't see why the deuce she didn't advertise. I would have

answered in a minute. I can't help saying it, old man, but I feel sorry for Anne, 'pon my soul, I do. I don't think she's doing this of her own free will. See what her mother did to George and that little girl in there? I tell you there's something nasty and —"

"I may as well tell you that Anne *is* doing this thing of her own free will," said Braden gravely.

"I don't believe it," said Dodge.

"At any rate, Simmy, I'm grateful to you for standing clear while there was still a chance for me. So long! I must be getting up to the hospital, and then around to see her doctor."

"So long, Brady. See you on Thursday." He meant, good soul, that he would be at the hospital on that day.

CHAPTER VIII

AN hour later, Mr. Simeon Dodge appeared at the home of Anne Tresslyn. In place of his usual care-free manner there now rested upon him an air of extreme gravity. This late afternoon visit was the result of an inspiration. After leaving Thorpe he found himself deeply buried in reflection which amounted almost to abstraction. He was disturbed by the persistency of the thoughts that nagged at him, no matter whither his aimless footsteps carried him. For the life of him, he could not put from his mind the conviction that Anne Tresslyn was not responsible for her actions.

He was convinced that she had been bullied, cowed, coerced, or whatever you like, into this atrocious marriage, and, of course, there could be no one to blame but her soulless mother. The girl ought to be saved. (These are Simmy's thoughts.) She was being sacrificed to the greed of an unnatural mother. Admitting, for the sake of argument, that she was no longer in love with Braden Thorpe, there still remained the positive conviction that she could not be in love with any one else, and certainly not with that treacherous old man in Washington Square. That, of course, was utterly impossible, so there was but the one alternative: she was being forced into a marriage that would bring the most money into the hands of the designing and to him, clearly unnatural parent.

He knew nothing of the ante-nuptial settlement, nor was he aware of the old man's quixotic design in con-

ing between Braden and the girl he loved. To Simmy it was nothing short of brigandage, a sort of moral outlawry. Old Templeton Thorpe deserved a coat of tar and feathers, and there was no word for the punishment that ought to be meted out to Mrs. Tresslyn. He tried to think of what ought to be done to her, and, getting as far as boiling oil, gave up in despair, for even that was too much like compassion.

Money! The whole beastly business was money! He thought of his own unestimated wealth. Nothing but money,— horrible, insensate, devastating money! He shuddered as he thought of what his money was likely to bring to him in the end: a loveless wife; avarice in place of respect; misery instead of joy; destruction! How was he ever to know whether a girl was marrying him for himself or for the right to lay hands upon the money his father had left to him when he died? How can any rich man know what he is getting into when he permits a girl to come into his home? To burglarise it with the sanction of State and Church, perhaps, and to escape with the connivance of both after she's got all she wants. That's where the poor man has an advantage over the unprotected rich: he is never confronted by a problem like this. He doesn't have to stop and wonder why the woman marries him. He knows it's love, or stupidity, or morality, but it is never duplicity.

Before he got through with it, Simmy had worked himself into a state of desperation. Regarding himself with unprejudiced eyes he saw that he was not the sort of man a girl would choose for a husband unless he had something besides a happy, loving disposition to offer. She would marry him for his money, of course; certainly he would be the last to suspect her of

marrying him for his beauty. He had never thought of it in this light before, and he was wet with the sweat of anguish. He could never be sure! He could love a woman with all his heart and soul, and still never be sure of her! Were all the girls he had loved in his college days — But here he stopped. It was too terrible to even contemplate, this unmerited popularity of his! If only one of them had been honest enough to make fun of his ears, or to snicker when he became impassioned, or to smile contemptuously from her superior height when he asked her to dance, — if only one of them had turned her back upon him, then he would have grasped the unwelcome truth about himself. But, now that he thought of it, not one of them had ever turned a deaf ear to his cajoleries, not one had failed to respond to his blandishments, not one had been sincere enough to frown upon him when he tried to be witty. And that brought him to another sickening standstill: was he as bright and clever and witty as people made him out to be? Wasn't he a dreadful bore, a blithering ass, after all? He felt himself turning cold to the marrow as he thought of the real value that people placed upon him. He even tried to recall a single thing that he had ever said that he could now, in sober judgment, regard as bright or even fairly clever. He couldn't, so then, after all, it was quite clear that he was tolerated because he had nothing but money.

Just as he was about to retire from his club where he had gone for solace, an inspiration was born. It sent him forthwith to Anne Tresslyn's home, dogged, determined and manfully disillusioned.

"Miss Tresslyn is very busy, Mr. Dodge," said

Rawson, "but she says she will see you, sir, if you will wait a few moments."

"I'll wait," said Simmy, and sat down.

He had come to the remarkable conclusion that as long as some one had to marry him for his money it might as well be Anne. He was fond of her and he could at least spare her the ignominy and horror of being wedded to old Templeton Thorpe. With his friend Braden admittedly out of the running, there was no just cause why he should not at least have a try at saving Anne. She might jump at the chance. He was already blaming himself for not having recognised her peril, her dire necessity, long before this. And since he had reached the dismal conclusion that no one could possibly love him, it would be the sensible thing on his part to at least marry some one whom he loved, thereby securing, in a way, half of a bargain when he might otherwise have to put up with nothing at all. At any rate, he would be doing Anne a good turn by marrying her, and it was reasonably certain that she would not bring him any more unhappiness than any other woman who might accept him.

As he sat there waiting for her he began to classify his financial holdings, putting certain railroads and industrials into class one, others into class two, and so on to the best of his ability to recollect what really comprised his fortune. It was rather a hopeless task, for to save his life he could not remember whether he had Lake Shore stock or West Shore stock, and he did not know what Standard Oil was selling at, nor any of the bank stocks except the Fifth Avenue, which seldom went below forty-five hundred. There might be a very awkward situation, too, if he couldn't justify

his proposal with facts instead of conjectures. Suppose that she came out point blank and asked him what he was worth: what could he say? But then, of course, she wouldn't have to ask such a question. If she considered it possible to marry him, she would *know* how much he was worth without inquiring. As a matter of fact, she probably knew to a dollar, and that was a great deal more than he knew.

Half an hour passed before she came down. She was wearing her hat and was buttoning her gloves as she came hurriedly into the room. Simmy had a startling impression that he had seen a great many women putting on their gloves as they came into rooms where he was waiting. The significance of this extraordinary custom had never struck him with full force before. In the gloom of his present appraisal of himself, he now realised with shocking distinctness that the women he called upon were always on the point of going somewhere else.

"Hello, Simmy," cried Anne gaily. He had never seen her looking more beautiful. There was real colour in her smooth cheeks and the sparkle of enthusiasm in her big, dark eyes.

He shook hands with her. "Hello," he said.

"I can spare you just twenty minutes, Simmy," she said, peering at the little French clock on the mantelpiece with the frankest sort of calculation. "Going to the dressmaker's at five, you know. It's a great business, this getting married, Simmy. You ought to try it."

"I know I ought," said he, pulling a chair up close to hers. "That's what I came to see you about, Anne."

She gave a little shriek of wonder. "For heaven's

sake, Simmy, don't tell me that *you* are going to be married. I can't believe it."

He made note of the emphasis she put upon the pronoun, and secretly resented it.

"Depends entirely on you, Anne," he said. He looked over his shoulder to see if any one was within the sound of his voice, which he took the precaution to lower to what had always been a successful tone in days when he was considered quite an excellent purveyor of sweet nothings in dim hallways, shady nooks and unpopulated stairways. "I want you to marry me right away," he went on, but not with that amazing confidence of yester-years.

Anne blinked. Then she drew back and stared at him for a moment. A merry smile followed her brief inspection.

"Simmy, you've been drinking."

He scowled, and at that she laughed aloud. "'Pon my soul, not more than three, Anne. I rarely drink in the middle of the day. Almost never, I swear to you. Confound it, why should you say I've been drinking? Can't I be serious without being accused of drunkenness? What the devil do you mean, Anne, by intimating that I —"

"Don't explode, Simmy," she cried. "I wasn't intimating a thing. I was positively asserting it. But go on, please. You interest me. Don't try to look injured, Simmy. You can't manage it at all."

"I didn't come here to be insulted," he growled.

"Did you come here to insult me?" she inquired, the smile suddenly leaving her eyes.

"Good Lord, no!" he gasped. "Only I don't like what you said a minute ago. I never was more serious or more sober in my life. You've been proposed

to a hundred times, I suppose, and I'll bet I'm the only one you've ever accused of drinking at the time. It's just my luck. I —"

"What in the world are you trying to get at, Simmy Dodge?" she cried. "Are you really asking me to marry you?"

"Certainly," he said, far from mollified.

She leaned back in the chair and regarded him in silence for a moment. "Is it possible that you have not heard that I am to be married this month?" she asked, and there was something like pity in her manner.

"Heard it? Of course, I've heard it. Everybody's heard it. That's just what I've come to see you about. To talk the whole thing over. To see if we can't do something. Now, there is a way out of it, dear girl. It may not be the best way in the world but it's infinitely —"

"Are you crazy?" she cried, staring at him in alarm.

"See here, Anne," he said gently, "I am your friend. It will not make any difference to you if I tell you that I love you, that I've loved you for years. It's true nevertheless. I'm glad that I've at last had the courage to tell you. Still I suppose it's immaterial. I've come up here this afternoon to ask you to be my wife. I don't ask you to *say* that you love me. I don't want to put you in such a position as that. I know you don't love me, but —"

"Simmy! Oh, Simmy!" she cried out, a hysterical laugh in her throat that died suddenly in a strange, choking way. She was looking at him now with wide, comprehending eyes.

"I can't bear to see you married to that old man,

Anne," he went on. "It is too awful for words. You are one of the most perfect of God's creations. You shall not be sacrificed on this damned altar of — I beg your pardon, I did not mean to begin by accusing any one of deliberately forcing you into — into —" He broke off and pulled fiercely at his little moustache.

"I see now," she said presently. "You are willing to sacrifice yourself in order that I may be spared. Is that it?"

"It isn't precisely a sacrifice. At least, it isn't quite the same sort of sacrifice that goes with your case as it now stands. In this instance, one of us at least is moved by a feeling of love; — in the other, there is no love at all. If you will take me, Anne, you will get a man who adores you for yourself. Isn't there something in that? I can give you everything that old man Thorpe can give, with love thrown in. I understand the situation. You are not marrying that old man because you love him. There's something back of it all that you can't tell me, and I shall not ask you to do so. But listen, dear; I'm decent, I'm honest, I'm young and I'm rich. I can give you everything that money will buy. Good Lord, I wish I could remember just what I've got to offer you in the way of — But, never mind now. If you'd like it, I'll have my secretary make out a complete list of —"

"So you think I am marrying Mr. Thorpe for his money,— is that it, Simmy dear?" she asked.

"I know it," said he promptly. "That is, you are marrying him because some one else — ahem! You can't expect me to believe that you love the old codger."

"No, I can't expect that of any one. Thank you,

Simmy. I think I understand. You really want to — to save me. Isn't that so?"

"I do, Anne, God knows I do," he said fervently. "It's the most beastly, diabolical —"

"You have been fair with me, Simmy," she broke in seriously, "so I'll be fair with you. I am marrying Mr. Thorpe for his money. I ought to be ashamed to confess it openly in this way, but I'm not. Every one knows just why I am going into this thing, and every one is putting the blame upon my mother. She is not wholly to blame. I am not being driven into it. It's in the blood of us. We are that kind. We are a bad lot, Simmy, we women of the breed. It goes a long way back, and we're all alike. Don't ask me to say anything more, dear old boy. I'm just a rotter, so let it go at that."

"You're nothing of the sort," he exclaimed, seizing her hand. "You're nothing of the sort!"

"Oh, yes, I am," she said wearily.

"See here, Anne," he said earnestly, "why not take me? If it's a matter of money, and nothing else, why not take me? That's what I mean. That's just what I wanted to explain to you. Think it over, Anne. For heaven's sake, don't go on with the other thing. Chuck it all and — take me. I won't bother you much. You can have all the money you need — and more, if you ask for it. Hang it all, I'll settle a stipulated amount upon you before we take another step. A million, two millions,— I don't care a hang,— only don't spoil this bright, splendid young life of yours by — Oh, Lordy, it's incomprehensible!"

She patted the back of his hand, gently, even tremblingly. Her eyes were very bright and very solemn.

"It has to go on now, Simmy," she said at last.

For a long time they were silent.

"I hope you have got completely over your love for Braden Thorpe," he said. "But, of course, you have. You don't care for him any more. You couldn't care for him and go on with this. It wouldn't be human, you know."

"No, it wouldn't be human," she said, her face rigid.

He was staring intently at the floor. Something vague yet sure was forming in his brain, something that grew to comprehension before he spoke.

"By Jove, Anne," he muttered, "I am beginning to understand. You wouldn't marry a *young* man for his money. It has to be an old man, an incredibly old man. I see!"

"I would not marry a young man, Simmy, for anything but love," she said simply. "I would not live for years with a man unless I loved him, be he poor or rich. Now you have it, my friend. I'm a pretty bad one, eh?"

"No, siree! I'd say it speaks mighty well for you," he cried enthusiastically. His whimsical smile returned and the points of his little moustache went up once more. "Just think of waiting for a golden wedding anniversary with a duffer like me! By Jove, I can see the horror of that myself. You just couldn't do it. I get your idea perfectly, Anne. Would it interest you if I were to promise to be extremely reckless with my life? You see, I'm always taking chances with my automobiles. Had three or four bad smash-ups already, and one broken arm. I *could* be a little more reckless and *very* careless if you think it would help. I've never had typhoid or pneumonia. I could go about exposing myself to all sorts of things after

a year or two. Flying machines, too, and long distance swimming. I might even try to swim the English Channel. North Pole expeditions, African wild game hunts,— all that sort of thing, Anne. I'll promise to do everything in my power to make life as short as possible, if you'll only —"

"Oh, Simmy, you are killing," she cried, laughing through her tears. "I shall always adore you."

"That's what they all say. Well, I've done my best, Anne. If you'll run away with me to-night, or to-morrow, or any time before the twenty-third, I'll be the happiest man in the world. You can call me up any time,— at the club or at my apartment. I'll be ready. Think it over. Good-bye. I wish I could wish you good luck in this other — but, of course, you couldn't expect that. We're a queer lot, all of us. I've always had a sneaking suspicion that if my mother had married the man she was truly in love with, I'd be a much better-looking chap than I am to-day."

She was standing beside him at the door, nearly a head taller than he.

"Or," she amended with a dainty grimace, "you might be a very beautiful girl, and that would be dreadful."

CHAPTER IX

THE day before the wedding, little Mrs. George Dexter Tresslyn, satisfactorily shorn of her appendix and on the rapid road to recovery that is traveled only by the perfectly healthy of mankind, confided to her doctor that the mystery of the daily bunch of roses was solved. They represented the interest and attention of her ex-husband, and, while they were unaccompanied by a single word from him, they also signified devotion.

"Which means that he is still making love to you?" said Thorpe, with mock severity.

"Clandestinely," said she, with a lovely blush and a curious softening of her eyes. She was wondering how this big, strong friend of hers would take the information, and how far she could go in her confidences without adventuring upon forbidden territory. Would he close the gates in the wall that guarded his own opinions of the common foe, or would he let her inside long enough for a joint discussion of the condition that confronted both of them: the Tresslyn nakedness? "He has been inquiring about me twice a day by telephone, Doctor, and this morning he was down stairs. My night nurse knows him by sight. He was here at half-past seven. That's very early for George, believe me. This hospital is a long way from where he lives. I would say that he got up at six or half-past, wouldn't you?"

"If he went to bed at all," said Thorpe, with a grim smile.

"Anyhow, it proves something, doesn't it?" she persisted.

"Obviously. He is still in love with you, if that's what you want me to say."

"That's just what I wanted you to say," she cried, her eyes sparkling. "Poor George! He's a dear, and I don't care who hears me say it. If he'd had any kind of a chance at all we wouldn't be — Oh, well, what's the use talking about it?" She sighed deeply.

Braden watched her flushed, drawn face with frowning eyes. He realised that she had suffered long in silence, that her heart had been wrung in the bitter stretches of a thousand nights despite the gay indifference of the thousand days that lay between them. For nearly three years she had kept alive the hungry thing that gnawed at her heart and would not be denied. He was sorry for her. She was better than most of the women he knew in one respect if in no other: she was steadfast. She had made a bargain and it was not her fault that it was not binding. He had but little pity for George Tresslyn. The little he had was due to the belief that if the boy had been older he would have fought a better fight for the girl. As she lay there now, propped up against the pillows, he could not help contrasting her with the splendid, high-bred daughter of Constance Tresslyn. That she was a high-minded, honest, God-fearing girl he could not for an instant doubt, but that she lacked the — there is but one word for it — *class* of the Tresslyn women he could not but feel as well as see. There was a distinct line between them, a line that it would take generations to cross. Still, she was a loyal, warm-heared, enduring creature, and by qualities such as

these she mounted to a much higher plane than Anne Tresslyn could ever hope to attain, despite her position on the opposite side of the line. He had never seen George's wife in anything but a blithe, confident mood; she was an unbeaten little warrior who kept her colours flying in the face of a despot called Fate. In fact, she was worthy of a better man than young Tresslyn, worthy of the steel of a nobler foe than his mother.

He was eager to comfort her. "It is pretty fine of George, sending you these flowers every day. I am getting a new light on him. Has he ever suggested to you in any way the possibility of — of — well, you know what I mean?"

"Fixing it up again between us?" she supplied, an eager light in her eyes. "No, never, Dr. Thorpe. He has never spoken to me, never written a line to me. That's fine of him too. He loves me, I'm sure of it, and he wants me, but it *is* fine of him not to bother me, now isn't it? He knows he could drag me back into the muddle, he knows he could make a fool of me, and yet he will not take that advantage of me."

"Would you go back to him if he asked you to do so?"

"I suppose so," she sighed. Then brightly: "So, you see, I shall refuse to see him if he ever comes to plead. That's the only way. We must go our separate ways, as decreed. I am his wife but I must not so far forget myself as to think that he is my husband. I know, Dr. Thorpe, that if we had been left alone, we could have managed somehow. He was young, but so was I. I am not quite impossible, am I? Don't these friends of yours like me, don't they find something worth while in me? If I were as com-

mon, as undesirable as Mrs. Tresslyn would have me to be, why do people of your kind like me,— take me up, as the saying is? I know that I don't really belong, I know I'm not just what they are, but I'm not so awfully hopeless, now am I? Isn't Mrs. Fenn a nice woman? Doesn't she go about in the smart set?"

She appeared to be pleading with him. He smiled.

"Mrs. Fenn is a very nice woman and a very smart one," he said. "You have many exceedingly nice women among your friends. So be of good cheer, if that signifies anything to you." He was chaffing her in his most amiable way.

"It signifies a lot," she said seriously. "By rights, I suppose, I should have gone to the devil. That's what was expected of me, you know. When I took all that money from Mrs. Tresslyn, it wasn't for the purpose of beating my way to the devil as fast as I could. I took it for an entirely different reason: to put myself where I could tell other people to go to him if I felt so inclined. I took it so that I could make of myself, if possible, the sort of woman that George Tresslyn might have married without stirring up a row in the family. I've taken good care of all that money. It is well invested. I manage to live and dress on the income. Rather decent of me, isn't it? Surprisingly decent, you might say, eh?"

"Surprisingly," he agreed, smiling.

"What George Tresslyn needs, Dr. Thorpe, is something to work for, something to make work an object to him. What has he got to work for now? Nothing, absolutely nothing. He's merely keeping up appearances, and he'll never get anywhere in God's world until he finds out that it's a waste of time working for a living that's already provided for him."

Thorpe was impressed by this quaint philosophy. "Would you, in your wisdom, mind telling me just what you think George would be capable of doing in order to earn a living for two people instead of one?"

She looked at him in surprise. "Why, isn't he big and strong and hasn't he a brain and a pair of hands? What more can a man require in this little old age? A big, strapping fellow doesn't have to sit down and say 'What in heaven's name am I to do with these things that God has given me?' Doesn't a blacksmith earn enough for ten sometimes, and how about the carpenter, the joiner and the man who brings the ice? Didn't I earn a living up to the time I burnt my fingers and had to be pensioned for dishonourable service? It didn't take much strength or intelligence to demonstrate mustard, did it? And you sit there and ask me what George is capable of doing! Why, he could do *anything* if he had to."

"You are really a very wonderful person," said he, with conviction. "I believe you could have made a man of George if you'd had the chance."

She looked down. "I suppose the world thinks I made him what he is now, so what's the use speculating? Let's talk about you for awhile. Miss McKane won't be back for a few minutes, so let's chat some more. Didn't I hear you tell her yesterday that you expect to leave for London about the first?"

"If you are up and about," said he.

She hesitated, a slight frown on her brow. "Do you know that you are pale and tired-looking, Dr. Thorpe? Have you looked in the glass at yourself lately?"

"Regularly," he said, forcing a smile. "I shave once a day, and I—"

"I'm serious. You don't look happy. You
confide in me, Doctor. I think you ought to
to some one about it. Are you still in love with M
Tresslyn? Is that what's taking the colour out

"I am not in love with Miss Tresslyn," he s
meeting her gaze steadily. "That is all over. I
confess that I have been dreadfully hurt, terr
shocked. A man doesn't get over such things ea
or quickly. I will not pretend that I am happy.
if that explains my appearance to you, Mrs. Tress
we'll say no more about it."

Her eyes filled with tears. "Oh, I'm sorry if
— if I've meddled,— if I've been too —"

"Don't worry," he broke in quickly. "I don'
the least mind. In fact, I'm glad you gave me
opportunity to say in so many words that I do
love her. I've never said it before. I'm glad t
I have said it. It helps, after all."

"You'll be happy yet," she sniffled. "I know
will. The world is full of good, noble women,
there's one somewhere who will make you glad that
thing has happened to you. Now, we'll change
subject. Miss McKane may pop in at any mom
you know. Have you any new patients?"

He smiled again. "No. You are my sole
only. Mrs. Fenn can't persuade Rumsey to hav
thing done to him, and Simmy Dodge refuses to br
his neck for scientific purposes, so I've given up h
I shall take no more cases. In a year I may c
back from London and then I'll go snooping about
nice little persons like you who —"

"Simmy Dodge says you are not living at y
grandfather's house any longer," she broke, irr
vantly.

"I am at a hotel," he said, and no more.

"I see," she said, frowning very darkly for her.

He studied her face for a moment, and then arose from the chair beside her bed. "You may be interested to hear that while I am invited to attend the wedding to-morrow afternoon I shall not be there," he said, divining her thoughts.

"I didn't like to ask," she said. The nurse came into the room. "He says I'm doing as well as could be expected, Miss McKane," she said glibly, "and if nothing unforeseen happens I'll be dodging automobiles in Fifth Avenue inside of two weeks. Good-bye, Doctor."

"Good-bye. I'll look in to-morrow — afternoon," he said.

. . . . . .

The marriage of Anne Tresslyn and Templeton Thorpe took place at the home of the bridegroom at four o'clock on the afternoon of the twenty-third. A departure from the original plans was made imperative at the eleventh hour by the fact that Mr. Thorpe had been quite ill during the night. His condition was in no sense alarming, but the doctors announced that a postponement of the wedding was unavoidable unless the ceremony could be held in the Thorpe home instead of at Mrs. Tresslyn's as originally planned. Moreover, the already heavily curtailed list of guests would have to be narrowed to even smaller proportions. The presence of so many as the score of selected guests might prove to be hazardous in view of the old gentleman's state of nerves, not to say health. Mr. Thorpe was able to be up and about with the aid of the imperturbable Wade, but he was exceedingly irascible and hard to manage. He was

annoyed with Braden. When the strange illness came early in the night, he sent out for his grandson. He wanted him to be there if anything serious was to result from the stroke,— he persisted in calling it a stroke, scornfully describing his attack as a "rush of blood to the head from a heart that had been squeezed too severely by old Father Time." Braden was not to be found. What annoyed Mr. Thorpe most was the young man's unaccountable disposition to desert him in his hour of need. In his querulous tirade, he described his grandson over and over again as an ingrate, a traitor, a good-for-nothing without the slightest notion of what an obligation means.

He did not know, and was not to know for many days, that his grandson had purposely left town with the determination not to return until the ill-mated couple were well on their way to the Southland, where the ludicrous honeymoon was to be spent. And so it was that the old family doctor had to be called in to take charge of Mr. Thorpe in place of the youngster on whom he had spent so much money and of whom he expected such great and glorious things.

He would not listen to a word concerning a postponement. Miss Tresslyn was called up on the telephone by Wade at eight o'clock in the morning, and notified of the distressing situation. What was to be done? At first no one seemed to know what *could* be done, and there was a tremendous flurry that for the time being threatened to deprive Mr. Thorpe of a mother-in-law before the time set for her to actually become one. Doctors were summoned to revive the prostrated Mrs. Tresslyn. She went all to pieces, according to reports from the servants' hall. In an hour's time, however, she was herself once more, and

then it was discovered that a postponement was the last thing in the world to be considered in a crisis of such magnitude. Hasty notes were despatched hither and thither; caterers and guests alike were shunted off with scant ceremony; chauffeurs were commandeered and motors confiscated; everybody was rushing about in systematic confusion, and no one paused to question the commands of the distracted lady who rose sublimely to the situation. So promptly and effectually was order substituted for chaos that when the clock in Mr. Thorpe's drawing-room struck the hour of four, exactly ten people were there and two of them were facing a minister of the gospel,— one in an arm chair with pillows surrounding him, the other standing tall and slim and as white as the driven snow beside him. . . .

Late that night, Mr. George Tresslyn came upon Simmy Dodge in the buffet at the Plaza.

"Well, you missed it," he said thickly. His high hat was set far back on his head and his face was flushed.

"Come over here in the corner," said Simmy, with discernment, "and for heaven's sake don't talk above a whisper."

"Whisper?" said George, annoyed. "What do I want to whisper for? I don't want to whisper, Simmy. I never whisper. I hate to hear people whisper. I refuse to whisper to anybody."

Simmy took him by the arm and led him to a table in a corner remote from others that were occupied.

"Maybe you'd rather go for a drive in the Park," he said engagingly.

"Nonsense! I've been driven all day, Simmy. I don't want to be driven any more. I'm tired, that's

what's the matter with me. Dog-tired, understand? Have a drink? Here, boy!"

"Thanks, George, I don't care for a drink. No, not for me, thank you. Strictly on the wagon, you know. Better let it alone yourself. Take my advice, George. You're not a drinking man and you can't stand it."

George glowered at him for a moment, and then let his eyes fall. "Guess you're right, Simmy. I've had enough. Never mind, waiter. First time I've been like this in a mighty long time, Simmy. But don't think I'm celebrating, because I ain't. I'm drowning something, that's all." He was almost in tears by this time. "I can't help thinking about her standin' there beside that old — Oh, Lord! I can't talk about it."

"That's right," said Simmy, persuasively. "I wouldn't if I were you. Come along with me. I'll walk home with you, George. A good night's rest will put —"

"Rest? My God, Simmy, I'm never going to rest again, not even in my grave. Say, do you know who I blame for all this business? Do you?"

"Sh!"

"I won't shoosh! I blame myself. I am to blame and no one else. If I'd been any kind of a man I'd have put my foot down — just like that — and stopped the thing. That's what I'd have done if I'd been a man, Simmy. And instead of stoppin' it, do you know what I did? I went down there and stood up with old Thorpe as his best man. Can you beat that? His best man! My God! Wait a minute. See, he was sittin' just like you are — lean back a little and drop your chin — and I was standing right

here, see — on this side of him. Just like this. And over here was Anne — oh, Lord! And here was Katherine Browne,— best maid, you know,— I mean maid of honour. Standin' just like this, d'you see? And then right in front here was the preacher. Say, where do all these preachers come from? I've never seen that feller in all my life, and still they say he's an old friend of the family. Fine business for a preacher to be in, wasn't it? Fi-ine bus-i-ness! He ought to have been ashamed of himself. By Gosh, come to think of it, I believe he was worse than I. He might have got out of it if he'd tried. He looked like a regular man, and I'm nothing but a fish-worm."

"Not so loud, George, for heaven's sake. You don't want all these men in here to —"

"Right you are, Simmy, right you are. I'm one of the fellers that talks louder than anybody else and thinks he's as big as George Washington because he's got a bass voice." He lowered his voice to a hoarse, raucous whisper and went on. "And mother stood over there, see,— right about where that cuspidor is, — and looked at the preacher all the time. Watchin' to see that he kept his face straight, I suppose. Couple of old rummies standin' back there where that table is, all dressed up in Prince Alberts and shaved within an inch of their lives. Lawyers, I heard afterwards. Old Mrs. Browne and Doc. Bates stood just behind me. Now you have it, just as it was. Curtains all down and electric lights going full blast. It wouldn't have been so bad if the lights had been out. Couldn't have seen old Tempy, for one thing, and Anne's face for another. I'll never forget Anne's face." His own face was now as white as chalk and convulsed with genuine emotion.

Simmy was troubled. There was that about George Tresslyn that suggested a subsequent catastrophe. He was in no mood to be left to himself. There was the despairing look of the man who kills in his eyes, but who kills only himself.

"See here, George, let's drop it now. Don't go on like this. Come along, do. Come to my rooms and I'll make you comfortable for the —"

But George was not through with his account of the wedding. He straightened up and, gritting his teeth, went on with the story. "Then there were the responses, Simmy,— the same that we had, Lutie and I,— just the same, only they sounded queer and awful and strange to-day. Only young people ought to get married, Simmy. It doesn't seem so rotten when young people lie like that to each other. Before I really knew what had happened the preacher had pronounced them husband and wife, and there I stood like a block of marble and held my peace when he asked if any one knew of a just cause why they shouldn't be joined in holy wedlock. I never even opened my lips. Then everybody rushed up and congratulated Anne! And kissed her, and made all sorts of horrible noises over her. And then what do you think happened? Old Tempy up and practically ordered everybody out of the house. Said he was tired and wanted to be left alone. 'Good-bye,' he said, just like that, right in our faces — right in mother's face, and the preacher's, and old Mrs. Browne's. You could have heard a pin drop. 'Good-bye,' that's what he said, and then, will you believe it, he turned to one of the pie-faced lawyers and said to him: 'Will you turn over that package to my wife, Mr. Hollenback?' and then he says to that man of his: 'Wade, be

good enough to hand Mr. Tresslyn the little acknowledgment for his services?' Then and there, that lawyer gave Anne a thick envelope and Wade gave me a little box,— a little bit of a box that I wish I'd kept to bury the old skinflint in. It would be just about his size. I had it in my vest pocket for awhile. 'Wade, your arm,' says he, and then with what he probably intended to be a sweet smile for Anne, he got to his feet and went out of the room, holding his side and bending over just as if he was having a devil of time to keep from laughing out loud. I heard the doctor say something about a pain there, but I didn't pay much attention. What do you think of that? Got right up and left his guests, his bride and everybody standing there like a lot of goops. His bride, mind you. I'm dead sure that so-called stroke of his was all a bluff. He just put one over on us, that's all. Wasn't any more sick than I am. Didn't you hear about the stroke? Stroke of luck, I'd call it. And say, what do you think he gave me as a little acknowledgment for my services? Look! Feast your eyes upon it!" He turned back the lapel of his coat and fumbled for a moment before extracting from the cloth a very ordinary looking scarf-pin, a small aqua-marine surrounded by a narrow rim of pearls. "Great, isn't it? Magnificent tribute! You could get a dozen of 'em for fifty dollars. That's what I got for being best man at my sister's funeral, and, by God, it's more than I deserved at that. He had me sized up properly, I'll say that for him."

He bowed his head dejectedly, his lips working in a sort of spasmodic silence. Dodge eyed him with a curious, new-born commiseration. The boy's self-abasement, his misery, his flouting of his own weak-

ness were not altogether the result of maudlin reaction. He presented a combination of manliness and defectiveness that perplexed and irritated Simeon Dodge. He did not want to feel sorry for him and yet he could not help doing so. George's broad shoulders and splendid chest were heaving under the strain of a genuine, real emotion. Drink was not responsible for his present estimate of himself; it had merely opened the gates to expression.

Simmy's scrutiny took in the fine, powerful body of this incompetent giant,— for he was a giant to Simmy, — and out of his appraisal grew a fresh complaint against the Force that fashions men with such cruel inconsistency. What would not he perform if he were fashioned like this splendid being? Why had God given to George Tresslyn all this strength and beauty, to waste and abuse, when He might have divided His gifts with a kindlier hand? To what heights of attainment in all the enterprises of man would not he have mounted if Nature had but given to him the shell that George Tresslyn occupied? And why should Nature have put an incompetent, useless dweller into such a splendid house when he would have got on just as well or better perhaps in an insignificant body like his own? Proportions were wrong, outrageously wrong, grieved Simmy as he studied the man who despised the strength God had given him. And down in his honest, despairing soul, Simmy Dodge was saying to himself that he would cheerfully give all of his wealth, all of his intelligence, all of his prospects, in exchange for a physical body like George Tresslyn's. He would court poverty for the privilege of enjoying other triumphs along the road to happiness.

"Why don't you say something?" demanded George,

suddenly looking up. "Call me whatever you please, Simmy; I'll not resent it. Hang it all, I'll let you kick me if you want to. Wouldn't you like to, Simmy?"

"Lord love you, no, my boy," cried the other, reaching out and laying a hand on George's shoulder. "See here, George, there's a great deal more to you than you suspect. You've got everything that a man ought to have except one thing, and you can get that if you make up your mind to go after it."

"What's that?" said George, vaguely interested.

"Independence," said Simmy. "Do you know what I'd do if I had that body and brain of yours?"

"Yes," said George promptly. "You'd go out and lick the world, Simmy, because you're that kind of a feller. You've got character, you have. You've got self-respect, and ideals, and nerve. I ought to have been put into your body and you into mine."

Simmy winced. "Strike out for yourself, George. Be somebody. Buck up, and —"

George sagged back into the chair as he gloomily interrupted the speaker. "That's all very fine, Simmy, that sort of talk, but I'm not in the mood to listen to it now. I wasn't through telling you about the wedding. Where was I when I stopped? Oh, yes, the scarf-pin. Hey, waiter! Come here a second."

A waiter approached. With great solemnity George arose and grasped him by the shoulder, and a moment later had removed the nickel-plated badge from the man's lapel. The waiter was tolerant. He grinned. It was what he was expected to do under the circumstances. But he was astonished by the next act of the tall young man in evening clothes. George proceeded to jam the scarf-pin into the fellow's coat where the badge of service had rested the instant be-

fore. Then, with Simmy looking on in disgust, he pinned the waiter's badge upon his own coat. "There!" he said, with a sneer. "That is supposed to make a gentleman of you, and this makes a man of me. On your way, gentleman! I—"

"For heaven's sake, George," cried Simmy, arising. "Don't be an ass." He took the tag from Tresslyn's coat and handed it back to the waiter. "Give him the scarf-pin if you like, old man, but don't rob him of his badge of honour. He earns an honest living with that thing, you know."

George sat down. He was suddenly abashed. "What an awful bounder you must think I am, Simmy."

"Nonsense. You're a bit tight, that's all." He slipped the waiter a bank-note and motioned him away. "Now, let's go home, George."

"Yes, sir; he turned and walked out of the room, leaving all of us standing there," muttered George, with a mental leap backward. "I'll never forget it, long as I live. He simply scorned the whole lot of us. I went away as quickly as I could, but the others beat me to it. I left mother and Anne there all alone, just wandering around the room as if they were half-stunned. Never, never will I forget Anne's white, scared face, and I've never seen mother so helpless, either. Anne gripped that big envelope so tight that it crumpled up into almost nothing. Mother took it away from her and opened it. Nobody was there but us three. I shan't tell you what was in the envelope. I'm not drunk enough for that."

"Never mind. It's immaterial, in any event." Simmy had called for his check.

George's mind took a new twist. Suddenly he sprang

to his feet. "By the way, before I forget it, do you know where I can find Braden Thorpe?"

A black scowl disfigured his face. There was an ugly, ominous glare in his fast clearing eyes. Simmy, coming no higher than his shoulder, linked his arm through one of George's and started toward the door with him. He was headed for the porters' entrance.

"He's out of town, George. Don't bother about Braden."

"I'm going to kill Brady Thorpe, Simmy," said George hoarsely. Simmy felt the big right arm swell and become as rigid as steel.

"Don't talk like a fool," he whispered.

"He didn't act right by Anne," said George. "He's got to account to me. He's —"

They were in the narrow hallway by this time. Simmy called to a porter.

"Get me a taxi, will you?"

"I say he didn't act right by Anne. It's his fault that she — Let go my arm, Simmy!" He gave it a mighty wrench.

"All right," said Simmy, maintaining his equilibrium with some difficulty after the jerk he had received. "Don't you want me to be your friend, George?"

George glared at him, and then broke into a shamed, foolish laugh. "Forgive me, Simmy. Of course, I want you as my friend. I depend upon you."

"Then stop this talk about going after Braden. In heaven's name, you kid, what has he done to you or Anne? He's the one who deserves sympathy and —"

"I've got it in for him because he's a coward and a skunk," explained George, lowering his voice with praise-worthy consideration. "You see, it's just this

way, Simmy. He didn't do the right thing by Anne. He ought to have come back here and *made* her marry him. That's where he's to blame. He ought to have gone right up to the house and grabbed her by the throat and choked her till she gave in and went with him to a justice-of-the-peace or something. He owed it to her, Simmy,— he was in duty bound to save her. If he hadn't been a sneakin' coward, he'd have choked her till she was half-dead and then she would have gone with him gladly. Women like a brave man. They like to be choked and beaten and —"

Simmy laughed. "Do you call it bravery to choke a woman into submission, and drag her off to —"

"I call it cowardice to give up the woman you love if she loves you," said George. "I know what I'm talking about, too, because I'm one of the sneakingest cowards on earth. What do you think of me, Simmy? What does everybody think of me? Wouldn't call me a brave man, would you?"

"The cases are not parallel. Braden's case is different. He couldn't force Anne to —"

"See here, Simmy," broke in George, wonderingly, "I hadn't noticed it before, but, by giminy, I believe you're tipsy. You've been drinking, Simmy. No sober man would talk as you do. When you sober up, you'll think just as I do,— and that is that Brady Thorpe ought to have been a man when he had the chance. He ought to have stuck his fist under Anne's nose and said 'Come on, or I'll smash you,' and she'd have gone with him like a little lamb, and she'd have loved him a hundred times more than she ever loved him before. He didn't do the right thing by her, Simmy. He didn't, curse him, and I'll never forgive him. I'm going to wring his neck, so help me Moses.

I've been a coward just as long as I intend to be. Take a good look at me, Simmy. If you watch closely you may see me turning into a man."

"Get in," said Simmy, pushing him toward the door of the taxi-cab. "A little sleep is what you need."

"And say, there's another thing I've got to square up with Brady Thorpe," protested George, holding back. "He took Lutie up there to that beastly hospital and slashed her open, curse him. A poor, helpless little girl like that! Call that brave? Sticking a knife into Lutie? He's got to settle with me for that, too."

And then Simmy understood.

CHAPTER X

MUCH may happen in a year's time. The history of the few people involved in the making of this narrative presents but few new aspects, and yet there is now to be disclosed an unerring indication of great and perhaps enduring changes in the lives of every one concerned.

To begin with, Templeton Thorpe, at the age of seventy-eight, is lying at the edge of his grave. On the day of his marriage with Anne Tresslyn, he put down his arms in the long and hopeless conflict with an enemy that knows no pity, a foe so supremely confident that man has been powerless to do more than devise a means to temporarily check its relentless fury. The thing in Mr. Thorpe's side was demanding the tolls of victory. There was no curbing its wrath: neither the soft nor the harsh answer of science had served to turn it away. The hand with the gleaming, keen-edged knife had been offered against it again and again, but the stroke had never fallen, for always there stood between it and the surgeon who would slay the ravager, the resolute fear of Templeton Thorpe. Time there was when the keen-edged knife might have vanquished or at least deprived it of its early venom, but the body of a physical coward housed it and denied admittance to all-comers. Templeton Thorpe did not fear death. He wanted to die, he implored his Maker to become his Destroyer. The torture of a slow, inevitable death, however, was as nothing to the horror of the knife that is sharp and cold.

When he went upstairs with Wade on that memorable twenty-third of March, he said to his enemy: "Be quick, that's all I ask of you," and then prepared to wait as patiently as he could for the friendly end.

From that day on, he was to the eyes of the world what he had long been to himself in secret: a sick man without hope. Weeks passed before his bride recognised the revolting truth, and when she came to know that he was doomed her pity was so vast that she sickened under its weight. She had come prepared to see him die, as all men do when they have lived out their time, but she had not counted on seeing him die like this, with suffering in his bleak old eyes and a smile of derision on his pallid lips.

Old Templeton Thorpe's sufferings were for himself, and he guarded them jealously with all the fortitude he could command. His irascibility increased with his determination to fight it out alone. He disdained every move on her part to extend sympathy and help to him. To her credit, be it said, she would have become his nurse and consoler if he had let down the bars,— not willingly, of course, but because there was in Anne Thorpe, after all, the heart of a woman, and of such it must be said there is rarely an instance where its warmth has failed to respond to the call of human suffering. She would have tried to help him, she would have tried to do her part. But he was grim, he was resolute. She could not bridge the gulf that lay between them. His profound tolerance did not deceive her; it was scorn of the most poignant character.

Braden was in Europe. He was expected in New York by the middle of March. His grandfather would not consent to his being sent for, although it

was plain to be seen that he lived only for the young man's return.

Anne had once suggested, timorously, that Braden's place was at the sufferer's bedside, but the smile that the old man bestowed upon her was so significant, so full of understanding, that she shrank within herself and said no more. She knew, however, that he longed for the sustaining hand of his only blood relation, that he looked upon himself as utterly alone in these last few weeks of life; and yet he would not send out the appeal that lay uppermost in his thoughts. In his own good time Braden would come back and there would be perhaps one long, farewell grip of the hand.

After that, ironic peace.

He could not be cured himself, but he wanted to be sure that Braden was cured before he passed away. He knew that his grandson would not come home until the last vestige of love and respect for Anne Tresslyn was gone; not until he was sure that his wound had healed beyond all danger of bleeding again. Mr. Thorpe was satisfied that he had served his grandson well. He was confident that the young man would thank him on his death-bed for turning the hand of fate in the right direction, so that it pointed to contentment and safety. Therefore, he felt himself justified in forbidding any one to acquaint Braden of the desperate condition into which he had fallen. He insisted that no word be sent to him, and, as in all things, the singular power of old Templeton Thorpe prevailed over the forces that were opposed. Letters came to him infrequently from the young man,— considerate, formal letters in which he never failed to find the touch of repressed gratitude that inspired the distant writer. Soon he would be coming home to "set

up for himself." Soon he would be fighting the battle of life on the field that no man knew and yet was traversed by all.

Dr. Bates and the eminent surgeons who came to see the important invalid, discussed among themselves, but never in the presence of Mr. Thorpe, the remarkable and revolutionary articles that had been appearing of late in one of the medical journals over the signature of Braden Thorpe. There were two articles, one in answer to a savage, denunciatory communication that had been drawn out by the initial contribution from the pen of young Thorpe.

In his first article, Braden had deliberately taken a stand in favour of the merciful destruction of human life in cases where suffering is unendurable and the last chance for recovery or even relief is lost. He had the courage, the foolhardiness to sign his name to the article, thereby irrevocably committing himself to the propaganda. A storm of sarcasm ensued. The great surgeons of the land ignored the article, amiably attributing it to a "young fool who would come to his senses one day." Young and striving men in the profession rushed into print,— or at least tried to do so,— with the result that Braden was excoriated by a thousand pens. Only one of these efforts was worthy of notice, and it inspired a calm, dispassionate rejoinder from young Thorpe, who merely called attention to the fact that he was not trying to "make murderers out of God's commissioners," but was on the other hand advocating a plan by which they might one day,— a far-off day, no doubt,— extend by Man's law, the same mercy to the human being that is given to the injured beast.

Anne was shocked one day by a callous observation

on the lips of old Dr. Bates, a sound practitioner and ordinarily as gentle as the average family doctor one hears so much about. Mr. Thorpe was in greater pain than usual that day. Opiates were of little use in these cruel hours. It was now impossible to give him an amount sufficient to produce relief without endangering the life that hung by so thin a thread.

"I suppose this excellent grandson of his would say that Mr. Thorpe ought to be killed forthwith, and put out of his misery," said the doctor, discussing his patient's condition with the young wife in the library after a long visit upstairs.

Anne started violently. "What do you mean by that, Dr. Bates?" she inquired, after a moment in which she managed to subdue her agitation.

"Perhaps I shouldn't have said it," apologised the old physician, really distressed. "I did it quite thoughtlessly, my dear Mrs. Thorpe. I forgot that you do not read the medical journals."

"Oh, I know what Braden has always preached," she said hurriedly. "But it never — it never occurred to me that —" She did not complete the sentence. A ghastly pallor had settled over her face.

"That his theory might find application to the case upstairs?" supplied the doctor. "Of course it would be unthinkable. Very stupid of me to have spoken of it."

Anne leaned forward in her chair. "Then you regard Mr. Thorpe's case as one that might be included in Braden's —" Again she failed to complete a sentence.

"Yes, Mrs. Thorpe," said Dr. Bates gravely. "If young Braden's pet theory were in practice now, your husband would be entitled to the mercy he prescribes."

"He has no chance?"

"Absolutely no chance."

"All there is left for him is to just go on suffering until — until life wears out?"

"We are doing everything in our power to alleviate the suffering,— everything that is known to science," he vouchsafed. "We can do no more."

"How long will he live, Dr. Bates?" she asked, and instantly shrank from the fear that he would misinterpret her interest.

"No man can answer that question, Mrs. Thorpe. He may live a week, he may live six months. I give him no more than two."

"And if he were to consent to the operation that you once advised, what then?"

"That was a year ago. I would not advise an operation now. It is too late. In fact, I would be opposed to it. There are men in my profession who would take the chance, I've no doubt,— men who would risk all on the millionth part of a chance."

"You think he would die on the operating table?"

"Perhaps,— and perhaps not. That isn't the point. It would be useless, that's all."

"Then why isn't Braden's theory sound and humane?" she demanded sharply.

He frowned. "It is humane, Mrs. Thorpe," said he gravely, "but it isn't sound. I grant you that there is not one of us who would not rejoice in the death of a man in Mr. Thorpe's condition, but there is not one who would deliberately take his life."

"It is all so cruel, so horribly cruel," she said. "The savages in the heart of the jungle can give us lessons in humanity."

"I daresay," said he. "By the same reasoning, is

it wise for us to receive lessons in savagery from them?"

Anne was silent for a time. She felt called upon to utter a defence for Braden but hesitated because she could not choose her words. At last she spoke. "I have known Braden Thorpe all my life, Dr. Bates. He is sincere on this question. I think you might grant him that distinction."

"Lord love you, madam, I haven't the faintest doubt as to his sincerity," cried the old doctor. "He is voicing the sentiment of every honest man in my profession, but he overlooks the fact that sentiment has a very small place among the people we serve,— in other words, the people who love life and employ us to preserve it for them, even against the will of God."

"They say that soldiers on the field of battle sometimes mercifully put an end to the lives of their mutilated comrades," she mused aloud.

"And they make it their business to put an end to the lives of the perfectly sound and healthy men who confront them on that same field of battle," he was quick to return. "There is a wide distinction between a weapon and an instrument, Mrs. Thorpe, and there is just as much difference between the inspired soldier and the uninspired doctor, or between impulse and decision."

"I believe that Mr. Thorpe would welcome death," said she.

Dr. Bates shook his head. "My dear, if that were true he could obtain relief from his suffering to-day,— this very hour."

"What do you mean?" she cried, with a swift shudder, as one suddenly assailed by foreboding.

"There is a very sharp razor blade on his dressing-

table," said Dr. Bates with curious deliberation. "Besides that, there is sufficient poison in four of those little — But there, I must say no more. You are alarmed,— and needlessly. He will not take his own life, you may be sure of that. By reaching out his hand he can grasp death, and he knows it. A month ago I said this to him: 'Mr. Thorpe, I must ask you to be very careful. If you do not sleep well to-night, take one of these tablets. If one does not give you relief, you may take another, but no more. Four of them would mean certain, almost instant death.' For more than a month that little box of tablets has lain at his elbow, so to speak. Death has been within reach all this time. Those tablets are still there, Mrs. Thorpe, so now you understand."

"Yes," she said, staring at him as if fascinated; "they are still there. I understand."

The thick envelope that Mr. Hollenback handed to Anne on the day of her wedding contained a properly executed assignment of securities amounting to two million dollars, together with an order to the executors under his will to pay in gold to her immediately after his death an amount sufficient to cover any shrinkage that may have occurred in the value of the bonds by reason of market fluctuations. In plain words, she was to have her full two millions. There was also an instrument authorising a certain Trust Company to act as depository for these securities, all of which were carefully enumerated and classified, with instructions to collect and pay to her during his lifetime the interest on said bonds. At his death the securities were to be delivered to her without recourse to the courts, and were to be free of the death tax, which was to be paid from the residue of the estate. There was a provision,

however, that she was to pay the state, city and county taxes on the full assessed value of these bonds during his lifetime, and doubtless by premeditation on his part all of them were subject to taxation. This unsuspected "joker" in the arrangements was frequently alluded to by Anne's mother as a "direct slap in the face," for, said she, it was evidently intended as a reflection upon the Tresslyns who, as a family, it appears, were very skilful in avoiding the payment of taxes of any description. (It was a notorious fact that the richest of the Tresslyns was little more than a mendicant when the time came to take his solemn oath concerning taxable possessions.)

Anne took a most amazing stand in respect to the interest on these bonds. Her income from them amounted to something over ninety thousand dollars a year, for Mr. Thorpe's investments were invariably sound and sure. He preferred a safe four or four and a half per cent. bond to an "attractive six." With the coming of each month in the year, Anne was notified by the Trust Company that anywhere from seven to eight thousand dollars had been credited to her account in the bank. She kept her own private account in another bank, and it was against this that she drew her checks. She did not withdraw a dollar of the interest arising from her matrimonial investment!

Mrs. Tresslyn, supremely confident and self-assured, sustained the greatest shock of her life when she found that Anne was behaving in this quixotic manner about the profits of the enterprise. At first she could not believe her ears. But Anne was obdurate. She maintained that her contract called for two million dollars and no more, and she refused to consider this extraneous accumulation as rightfully her own. Her mother

berated her without effect. She subjected her to countless attacks from as many angles, but Anne was as "hard as nails."

"I'm not earning this ninety thousand a year, mother," she declared hotly, "and I shall not accept it as a gift. If I were Mr. Thorpe's wife in every sense of the term, it might be different, but as you happen to know I am nothing more than a figure of speech in his household. I am not even his nurse, nor his housekeeper, nor his friend. He despises me. I despise myself, for that matter, so he's not quite alone in his opinion. I've sold myself for a price, mother, but you must at least grant me the privilege of refusing to draw interest on my infamy."

"Infamy!" gasped Mrs. Tresslyn. "Infamy? What rot,— what utter rot!"

"Just the same, I shall confine myself to the original bargain. It is bad enough. I shan't make it any worse by taking money that doesn't belong to me."

"Those bonds are yours," snapped Mrs. Tresslyn. "You are certainly entitled to the interest. You —"

"They are *not* mine," returned Anne decisively. "Not until Mr. Thorpe is dead, if you please. I am to have my pay after he has passed away, no sooner. That was the bargain."

"You did not hesitate to accept some rather expensive pearls if I remember correctly," said Mrs. Tresslyn bitingly.

"That was his affair, not mine," said Anne coolly. "He despises me so thoroughly that he thought he could go beyond his contract and tempt me with this interest we are quarrelling about, mother. He was sure that I would jump at it as a greedy fish snaps at the bait. But I disappointed him. I shall never

forget the look of surprise,— no, it was wonder,— that came into his eyes when I flatly refused to take this interest. That was nearly a year ago. He began to treat me with a little respect after that. There is scarcely a month goes by that he does not bring up the subject. I think he has never abandoned the hope that I may give in, after all. Lately he has taken to chuckling when I make my monthly protest against accepting this money. He can't believe it of me. He thinks there is something amusing about what I have been foolish enough to call my sense of honour. Still, I believe he has a little better opinion of me than he had at first. And now, mother, once and for all, let us consider the matter closed. I will not take the interest until the principal is indisputably mine."

"You are a fool, Anne," said her mother, in her desperation; "a simple, ridiculous fool. Why shouldn't you take it? It is yours. You can't afford to throw away ninety thousand dollars. The bank has orders to pay it over to you, and it is deposited to your account. That ought to settle the matter. If it isn't yours, may I enquire to whom does it belong?"

"Time enough to decide that, mother," said Anne, so composedly that Mrs. Tresslyn writhed with exasperation. "I haven't quite decided who is to have it in the end. You may be sure, however, that I shall give it to some worthy cause. It shan't be wasted."

"Do you mean to say that you will give it away — give it to charity?" groaned her mother.

"Certainly."

Words failed Mrs. Tresslyn. She could only stare in utter astonishment at this incomprehensible creature.

"I may have to ask your advice when the time comes," went on Anne, complacently. "You must assist me in selecting the most worthy charity, mother dear."

"I suppose it has never occurred to you that there is some justice in the much abused axiom that charity begins at home," said Mrs. Tresslyn frigidly.

"Not in our home, however," said Anne. "That's where it ends, if it ends anywhere."

"I have hesitated to speak to you about it, Anne, but I am afraid I shall now have to confess that I am sorely pressed for money," said Mrs. Tresslyn deliberately, and from that moment on she never ceased to employ this argument in her crusade against Anne's ingratitude.

There was no estrangement. Neither of them could afford to go to such lengths. They saw a great deal of each other, and, despite the constant bickerings over the idle money, there was little to indicate that they were at loggerheads. Mrs. Tresslyn was forced at last to recognise the futility of her appeals to Anne's sense of duty, and contented herself with occasional bitter references to her own financial distress. She couldn't understand the girl, and she gave up trying. As a matter of fact, she began to fear that she would never be able to understand either one of her children. She could not even imagine how they could have come by the extraordinary stubbornness with which they appeared to be afflicted.

As for George Tresslyn, he was going to the dogs as rapidly and as accurately as possible. He took to drink, and drink took him to cards. The efforts of Simmy Dodge and other friends, including the despised Percy Wintermill, were of no avail. He de-

veloped a pugnacious capacity for resenting advice. It was easy to see what was behind the big boy's behaviour: simple despair. He counted himself among the failures. In due time he lost his position in Wall Street and became a complaining dependent upon his mother's generosity. He met her arguments with the furious and constantly reiterated charge that she had ruined his life. That was another thing that Mrs. Tresslyn could not understand. How, in heaven's name, had she ruined his life?

He took especial delight in directing her attention to the upward progress of the discredited Lutie.

That attractive young person, much to Mrs. Tresslyn's disgust, actually had insinuated her vulgar presence into comparatively good society, and was coming on apace. Blithe, and gay, and discriminating, the former "mustard girl" was making a place for herself among the moderately smart people. Now and then her name appeared in the society columns of the newspapers, where, much to Mrs. Tresslyn's annoyance, she was always spoken of as "Mrs. George Dexter Tresslyn." Moreover, in several instances, George's mother had found her own name printed next to Lutie's in the alphabetical list of guests at rather large entertainments, and once,— heaven forfend that it should happen again! — the former "mustard girl's" picture was published on the same page of a supplement with that of the exclusive Mrs. Tresslyn and her daughter, Mrs. Templeton Thorpe, over the caption: "The Tresslyn Triumvirate," supplied by a subsequently disengaged art editor.

George came near to being turned out into the street one day when he so far forgot himself as to declare that Lutie was worth the whole Tresslyn lot put to-

gether, and she ought to be thankful she had had "the can tied to her" in time. His mother was livid with fury.

"If you ever mention that person's name in this house again, you will have to leave it forever. If she's worth anything at all it is because she has appropriated the Tresslyn name that you appear to belittle. You —"

"She didn't appropriate it," flared George. "I remember distinctly of having given it to her. I don't care what you say or do, mother, she deserves a lot of credit. She's made a place for herself, she's decent, she's clever —"

"She hasn't earned a place for herself, let me remind you, sir. She made it out of the proceeds of a sale, the sale of a husband. Don't forget, George, that she sold you for so much cash."

"A darned good bargain," said he, "seeing that she got me at my own value,— which was nothing at all."

Lutie went on her way serenely, securely. If she had a thought for George Tresslyn she succeeded very well in keeping it to herself. Men would have made love to her, but she denied them that exquisite distraction. Back in her mind lurked something that guaranteed immunity.

The year had dealt its changes to Lutie as well as to the others, but they were not important. Discussing herself frankly with Simmy Dodge one evening, she said:

"I'm getting on, am I not, Simmy? But, after all, why shouldn't I? I'm a rather decent sort, and I'm not a real vulgarian, am I? Like those people over there at the next table, I mean. The more I go about,

the more I realise that class is a matter of acquaintance. If you know the right sort of people, and have known them long enough, you unconsciously form habits that the other sort of people haven't got, so you're said to have 'class.' Of course, you've got to be imitative, you've got to be able to mimic the real ones, but that isn't difficult if you're half way bright, don't you know."

"Lord love you, Lutie, you don't have to imitate any one," said Simmy. "You're in a class by yourself."

"Thanks, Simmy. Don't let any one else at the table hear you say such things to me, though. They would think that I'd just come in from the country. Why shouldn't I get on? How many of the girls that you meet in your day's walk have graduated from a high-school? How many of the great ladies who rule New York society possess more than a common school education, outside of the tricks they've learned after they put on long frocks? Not many, let me tell you, Simmy. Four-fifths of them can't spell Connecticut, and they don't know how many e's there are in 'separate.' I graduated from a high school in Philadelphia, and my mother did the same thing before me. I also played on the basket-ball team, if that means anything to you. My parents were poor but respectable, God-fearing people, as they say in the novels, and they were quite healthy as parents go in these days, when times are hard and children so cheap that nobody's without a good sized pack of them. I was born with a brain that was meant to be used."

"What are you two talking about so secretively?" demanded Mrs. Rumsey Fenn, across the table from *them.*

"Ourselves, of course," said Lutie. "Bright people always have something in reserve, my dear. We save the very best for an extremity. Simmy delights in talking about me, and I love to talk about him. It's the simplest kind of small talk and doesn't disturb us in the least if we should happen to be thinking of something else at the time."

"Have you heard when Braden Thorpe is expected home, Simmy?"

"Had a letter from him yesterday. He sails next week. Is there any tinkering to be done for your family this season, Madge? Any little old repairs to be made?"

"I'm afraid not," said Mrs. Fenn desolately. "Rumsey positively refuses to imagine he's got a pain anywhere, and the baby's tonsils are disgustingly healthy."

"Old Templeton Thorpe's in a critical condition, I hear," put in Rumsey Fenn. "There'll be a choice widow in the market before long, I pledge you."

"Can't they operate?" inquired his wife.

"Not for malignant widows," said Mr. Fenn.

"Oh, don't be silly. I should think old Mr. Thorpe would let Braden operate. Just think what a fine boost it would give Braden if the operation was a success."

"And also if it failed," said one of the men, sententiously. "He's the principal heir, isn't he?"

Simmy scowled. "Brady would be the last man in the world to tackle the job," he said, and the subject was dropped at once.

And so the end of the year finds Templeton Thorpe on his death bed, Anne a quixotic ingrate, George among the diligently unemployed, Lutie on the crest

of popularity, Braden in contempt of court, and Mrs. Tresslyn sorely tried by the vagaries of each and every one of the aforesaid persons.

Simmy Dodge appears to be the only one among them all who stands just as he did at the beginning of the year. He has neither lost nor gained. He has merely stood still.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Dr. Braden Thorpe arrived in New York City on the fourteenth of March he was met at the pier by a horde of newspaper men. For the first time, he was made to appreciate "the importance of being earnest." These men, through a frequently prompted spokesman, put questions to him that were so startling in their boldness that he was staggered by the misconception that had preceded him into his home land.

He was asked such questions as these: "But, doctor, would you do that sort of thing to a person who was dear to you, — say a wife, a mother or an only child?" "How could you be sure that a person was hopelessly afflicted?" "Have you ever put this theory of yours into practice on the other side?" "How many lives have you taken in this way, doctor, — if it is a fair question?" "Do you expect to practise openly in New York?" "And if you do practise, how many patients do you imagine would come to you, knowing your views?" "How would you kill 'em, — with poison or what?" And so on, almost without end.

He was to find that a man can become famous and infamous in a single newspaper headline, and as for the accuracy of the interviews there was but one thing to be said: the questions were invariably theirs and the answers also. He did his best to make them understand that he was merely advancing a principle and not practising a crime, that his hand had never been

brought down to kill, that his heart was quite as tender as any other man's, and that he certainly was not advocating murder in any degree. Nor was he at present attempting to proselyte.

When he finally escaped the reporters, his brow was wet with the sweat of one who finds himself confronted by a superior force and with no means of defence. He knew that he was to be assailed by every paper in New York. They would tear him to shreds.

Wade was at the pier. He waited patiently in the background while the returned voyager dealt with the reporters, appearing abruptly at Braden's elbow as he was giving his keys to the inspector.

"Good morning, sir," said Wade, in what must be recorded as a confidential tone. He might have been repeating the salutation of yesterday morning for all that his manner betrayed.

"Hello, Wade! Glad to see you." Braden shook hands with the man. "How is my grandfather?"

"Better, sir," said the other, meaning that his master was more comfortable than he had been during the night.

Wade was not as much of an optimist as his reply would seem to indicate. It was his habit to hold back news in reserve as long as possible, doubtless for the satisfaction it gave him to dribble it out sparingly. He had found it to his advantage to break all sorts of news hesitatingly to his master, for he was never by way of knowing what Mr. Thorpe would regard as bad news. For example, early in his career as valet, he had rushed into Mr. Thorpe's presence with what he had every reason to believe would be good news. He had been sent over to the home of Mr. Thorpe's s[illegible] for an important bit of information, and he suppli[illegible]

it by almost shouting as he burst into the library: "It's a fine boy, sir, — a splendid ten-pounder, sir." But Mr. Thorpe, instead of accepting the good news gladly, spoiled everything by anxiously inquiring, "And how is the poor little mother getting along?" — a question which caused Wade grave annoyance, for he had to reply: "I'm sorry, sir, but she's not expected to live the hour out."

All of which goes to show that Mr. Thorpe never regarded any news as good without first satisfying himself that it wasn't bad.

"I have the automobile outside, sir," went on Wade, "and I am to look after your luggage."

"Thank you, Wade. If you'll just grab these bags and help the porter out to the car with them, I'll be greatly obliged. .And then you may drop me at the Wolcott. I shall stop there for a few days, until I get my bearings."

Wade coughed insinuatingly. "Beg pardon, sir, but I was to fetch you straight home."

"Do you mean to my grandfather's?" demanded the young man sharply.

"Yes, sir. Those were the orders."

"Orders to be disobeyed, I fear, Wade," said Braden darkly. "I am not going to Mr. Thorpe's house."

"I understand, sir," said Wade patiently. "I quite understand. Still it is my duty to report to you that Mr. Thorpe is expecting you."

"Nevertheless, I shall not —"

"Perhaps I should inform you that your grandfather is — er — confined to his bed. As a matter of fact, Mr. Braden, he is confined to his death-bed."

Braden was shocked. Later on, as he was being rushed across town in the car, he drew from Wade all

of the distressing details. He had never suspected the truth. Indeed, his grandfather had kept the truth from him so successfully that he had come to look upon him as one of the fortunate few who arrive at death in the full possession of health, those who die because the machinery stops of its own accord. And now the worst possible death was stalking his benefactor, driving, — always driving without pity. Braden's heart was cold, his face pallid with dread as he hurried up the steps to the front door of the familiar old house.

He had forgotten Anne and his vow never to enter the house so long as she was mistress of it. He forgot that her freedom was about to become an accomplished fact, that the thing she had anticipated was now at hand. He had often wondered how long it would be in coming to her, and how she would stand up under the strain of the half score of years or more that conceivably might be left to the man she had married. There had been times when he laughed in secret anticipation of the probabilities that attended her unwholesome adventure. Years of it! Years of bondage before she could lay hands upon the hard-earned fruits of freedom!

As he entered the hall Anne came out of the library to greet him. There was no hesitation on her part, no pretending. She came directly to him, her hand extended. He had stopped stock-still on seeing her.

"I am glad you have come, Braden," she said, letting her hand fall to her side. Either he had ignored it or was too dismayed to notice it at all. "Mr. Thorpe has waited long and patiently for you. I am glad you have come."

He was staring at her, transfixed. There was no change in her appearance. She was just as he had

seen her on that last, never-to-be-forgotten day, — the same tall, slender, beautiful Anne. And yet, as he stared, he saw something in her eyes that had not been there before: the shadow of fear.

"I must see him immediately," said he, and was at once conscious of a regret that he had not first said something kind to her. She had the stricken look in her eyes.

"You will find him in his old room," she said quietly. "The nurse is a friend of yours, a Miss McKane."

"Thank you." He turned away, but at the foot of the staircase paused. "Is there no hope?" he inquired. "Is it as bad as Wade —"

"There is only one hope, Braden," she said, "and that is that he may die soon." Curiously, he was not shocked by this remark. He appreciated the depth of feeling behind it. She was thinking of Templeton Thorpe, not of herself.

"I — I can't tell you how shocked, how grieved I am," he said. "It is — terrible."

She drew a few steps nearer. "I want you to feel, Braden, that you are free to come and go — and to stay — in this house. I know that you have said you would not come here while I am its mistress. I am in no sense its mistress. I have no place here. If you prefer not to see me, I shall make it possible by remaining in my room. It is only fair that I should speak to you at once about — about this. That is why I waited here to see you. I may as well tell you that Mr. Thorpe does not expect me to visit his room,— in fact, he undoubtedly prefers that I should not do so. I have tried to help him. I have done my best, Braden. I want you to know that. It is possible that he may tell you as much. Your place is here. You must not

regard me an obstacle. It will not be necessary for you to communicate with me. I shall understand. Dr. Bates keeps me fully informed." She spoke without the slightest trace of bitterness.

He heard her to the end without lifting his gaze from the floor. When she was through, he looked at her.

"You *are* the mistress of the house, Anne. I shall not overlook the fact, even though you may. If my grandfather wishes me to do so, I shall remain here in the house with him — to the end, not simply as his relative, but to do what little I can in a professional way. Why was I not informed of his condition?" His manner was stern.

"You must ask that question of Mr. Thorpe himself," said she. "As I have told you, he is the master of the house. The rules are his, not mine; and, by the same token, the commands are his."

He hesitated for a moment. "You might have sent word to me. Why didn't you?"

"Because I was under orders," she said steadily. "Mr. Thorpe would not allow us to send for you. There was an excellent purpose back of his decision to keep you on the other side of the Atlantic until you were ready to return of your own accord. I daresay, if you reflect for a moment, you will see through his motives."

His eyes narrowed. "There was no cause for apprehension," he said coldly.

"It was something I could not discuss with him, however," she returned, "and so I was hardly in a position to advise him. You must believe me, Braden, when I say that I am glad for his sake that you are here. He will die happily now."

"He has suffered — so terribly?"

"It has been too horrible,— too horrible," she cried, suddenly covering her eyes and shivering as with a great chill.

The tears rushed to Braden's eyes. "Poor old granddaddy," he murmured. Then, after a second's hesitation, he turned and swiftly mounted the stairs.

Anne, watching him from below, was saying to herself, over and over again: "He will never forgive me, he will never forgive me." Later on, alone in the gloomy library, she sat staring at the curtained window through which the daylight came darkly, and passed final judgment upon herself after months of indecision: "I have been too sure of myself, too sure of him. What a fool I've been to count on a thing that is so easily killed. What a fool I've been to go on believing that his love would survive in spite of the blow I've given it. I've lost him. I may as well say farewell to the silly hope I've been coddling all these months." She frowned as she allowed her thoughts to run into another channel. "But they shall not laugh at me. I'll play the game out. No whimpering, old girl. Stand up to it."

Wade was waiting outside his master's door, his ear cocked as of old. The same patient, obsequious smile greeted Braden as he came up.

"He knows you are here, Mr. Braden. I sent in word by the nurse."

"He is conscious?"

"Yes, sir. That's the worst of it. Always conscious, sir."

"Then he can't be as near to death as you think, Wade. He —"

"That's a pity, sir," said Wade frankly. "I was

in hopes that it would soon be all over for him."

"Am I to go in at once?"

"May I have a word or two with you first, sir?" said Wade, lowering his voice to a whisper and sending an uneasy glance over his shoulder. "Come this way, sir. It's safer over here. Uncommonly sharp ears he has, sir."

"Well, what is it? I must not be delayed —"

"I shan't keep you a minute, Mr. Braden. It's something I feel I ought to tell you. Mr. Thorpe is quite in his right mind, sir, so you'll appreciate more fully what a shock his proposition was to me. In a word, Mr. Braden, he has offered me a great sum of money if I'll put four of those little pills into a glass of water to-night and give it to him to drink. There's enough poison in them to kill three men in a flash, sir. My God, Mr. Braden, it was — it was terrible!" The man's face was livid.

"A great sum of money —" began Braden dumbly. Then the truth struck him like a blow in the face. "Good God, Wade,— he — he wanted you to *kill* him!"

"That's it, sir, that's it," whispered Wade jerkily. "He has an envelope up there with fifty thousand dollars in it. He had me count them a week ago, right before his eyes, and hide the envelope in a drawer. You see how he trusts me, sir? He knows that I could rob him to-night if I wanted to do so. Or what's to prevent my making off with the money after he's gone? Nobody would ever know. But he knows me too well. He trusts me. I was to give him the poison the night after you got home, and I would never be suspected of doing it because the pills have been lying on his table for weeks, ready for him to take at any time. Every

one might say that he took them himself, don't you see?"

"Then, in God's name, why doesn't he take them,— why does he ask you to give them to him?" cried Braden, an icy perspiration on his brow.

"That's the very point, sir," explained Wade. "He says he has tried to do it, but — well, he just can't, sir. Mr. Thorpe is a God-fearing man. He will not take his own life. He — he says he believes there is a hell, Mr. Braden. I just wanted to tell you that I — I can't do what he asks me to do. Not for all the money in the world. He seems to think that I don't believe there is a hell. Anyhow, sir, he appears to think it would be quite all right for me to kill a fellow man. Beg pardon, sir; I forgot that you have been writing all these articles about —"

"It's all right, Wade," interrupted Braden. "Tell me, has he made this proposition to any one else? To the nurses, to Murray — any one?"

Wade hesitated. "I'm quite sure he hasn't appealed to any one but me, sir, except — that is to say —"

"Who else?"

"He told me plainly that he couldn't ask any of the nurses to do it, because he thought it ought to be done by a friend or a — member of the family. The doctors, of course, might do it unbeknownst to him, but they won't, sir."

"Whom else did he speak to about it?" insisted Braden.

"I can't be sure, but I think he has spoken to Mrs. Thorpe a good many times about it. Every time she is alone with him, in fact, sir. I've heard him pleading with her,— yes, and cursing her, too,— and her voice

is always full of horror when she says 'No, no! will not do it! I cannot!' You see, sir, I alwa stand here by the door, waiting to be called, so I cat snatches of conversation when their voices are raise Besides, she's always as white as a sheet when s comes out, and two or three times she has actually r to her room as if she was afraid he was pursuing h I can't help feeling, Mr. Braden, that he considers h a member of the family, and so long as I won't do he —"

"Good God, Wade! Don't say anything mor I —" His knees suddenly seemed about to give w under him. He went on in a hoarse whisper: "Wh I — I am a member of the family. You don't suppo he'll — you don't suppose —"

"I just thought I'd tell you, sir," broke in Wad "so's you might be prepared. Will you go in no sir? He is most eager to see you."

Braden entered the room, sick with horror. A me ber of the family! A member of the family to do t killing!

He was shocked by the appearance of the sick o man. Templeton Thorpe had wasted to a thin, greyi shadow. His lips were as white as his cheek, and th was the colour of chalk. Only his eyes were brig and gleaming with the life that remained to him. T grip of his hand was strong and firm, and his voic too, was steady.

"I've been waiting for you, Braden, my boy," sa Mr. Thorpe, some time after the greetings. He turn himself weakly in the bed and, drawing a little near to the edge, lowered his voice to a more confidenti tone. His eyes were burning, his lips drawn tight across his teeth, — for even at his age Templet

Thorpe was not a toothless thing. They were alone in the room. The nurse had seized upon the prospect of a short respite.

"I wish I had known, granddaddy," lamented Braden. "You should have sent for me long ago."

"That is the fifth or sixth time you've made that remark in the last ten minutes," said Mr. Thorpe, a querulous note stealing into his voice. "Don't say it again. By the way, suppose that I had sent for you: what could you have done? What good could you have done? Answer me that."

"There is no telling, sir. At least, I could have done my share of the — that is to say, I might have been useful in a great many ways. You may be sure, sir, that I should have been in constant attendance. I should have been on hand night and day."

"You would have assisted Anne in the death watch, eh?" said Mr. Thorpe, with a ghastly smile.

"Don't say that, sir," cried Braden, flinching.

"I may not have the opportunity to speak with you again, Braden,— privately, I mean,— and, as my time is short, I want to confess to you that I have been agreeably surprised in Anne. She has tried to do her best. She has not neglected me. She regards me as a human being in great pain, and I am beginning to think that she has a heart. There is the bare possibility, my boy, that she might have made you a good wife if I had not put temptation in her way. In any event, she would not have dishonoured you. It goes without saying that she has been wife to me in name only. You may find some comfort in that. In the past few weeks I have laid even greater temptations before her and she has not fallen. I cannot explain further to you, but —" here he smiled wanly —"some

day she may tell you in the inevitable attempt to justify herself and win back what she has lost. Don't interrupt me, please. She *will* try, never fear, and you will have to be strong to resist her. I know what you would say to me, so don't say it. You are horrified by the thought of it, but the day will come when you must again raise your hand against the woman who loves you. Make no mistake, Braden; she loves you."

"I believe I would strike her dead if she made the slightest appeal to —"

"Never mind," snapped the old man. "I know you well enough to credit you with self-respect, if not self-abnegation. What I am trying to get at is this: do you hold a grudge against me for revealing this girl's true character to you?"

"I must ask you to excuse me from answering that question, grandfather," said Braden, compressing his lips.

The old man eyed him closely. "Is that an admission that you think I have wronged you in saving you from the vampires?" he persisted ironically.

"I cannot discuss your wife with you, sir," said the other.

Mr. Thorpe continued to regard his grandson narrowly for a moment or two longer, and then a look of relief came into his eyes. "I see. I shouldn't have asked it of you. Nevertheless, I am satisfied. My experiment is a success. You are qualified to distinguish between the Tresslyn greed and the Tresslyn love, so I have not failed. They put the one above the other and so far they have trusted to luck. If Anne had spurned my money I haven't the slightest doubt that she would have married you and made you a good wife. The fact that she did not spurn my money would seem

to prove that she wouldn't make anybody a good wife. I know all this is painful to you, my boy, but I must say it to you before I die. You see I am dying. That's quite apparent, even to the idiots who are trying to keep me alive. They do not fool me with their: 'Aha, Mr. Thorpe, how are we to-day? Better, eh?' I am dying by inches,— fractions of inches, to be precise." He stopped short, out of breath after this long speech.

Braden laid his hand upon the bony fore-arm. "How long have you known, granddaddy, that you had this — this —"

"Cancer? Say it, my boy. I'm not afraid of the word. Most people are. It's a dreadful word. How can I answer your question? Years, no doubt. It became active a year and a half ago. I knew what it was, even then."

"In heaven's name, sir, why did you let it go on? An operation at that time might have —"

"You forget that I could afford to wait. When a man gets to be as old as I am he can philosophise even in the matter of death. What is a year or two, one way or the other, to me? An operation is either an experiment or a last resort, isn't it? Well, my boy, I preferred to look upon it as a last resort, and as such I concluded to put it off until the last minute, when it wouldn't make any difference which way it resulted. If it had resulted fatally a year and a half ago, what would I have gained? If it should take place to-morrow, with the same result, haven't I cheated Time out of eighteen months?"

"But the pain, the suffering," cried Braden. "You might at least have spared yourself the whole lifetime of pain that you have lived in these last few months. You haven't cheated pain out of its year and a half."

"True," said Mr. Thorpe, his lips twitching with the pain he was trying to defy; "I have not been able to laugh at the futility of pain. Ah!" It was almost a scream that issued from between his stretched lips. He began to writhe. . . .

"Come in again to-night," he said half an hour later, whispering the words with difficulty. The two nurses and the doctor's assistant, who had been staying in the house for more than a week, now stood back from the bedside, dripping with perspiration. The paroxysm had been one of the worst he had experienced. They had believed for a time that it was also to be the last. Braden Thorpe, shaking like a leaf because of the very inactivity that was forced upon him by the activity of others, wiped the sweat from his brow, and nodded his head in speechless despair. "Come in to-night, after you've talked with Anne and Dr. Bates. I'm easier now. It can't go on much longer, you see. Bates gives me a couple of weeks. That means a couple of centuries of pain, however. Go now and talk it over with Anne."

With this singular admonition pounding away at his senses, Braden went out of the room. Wade,— the ever-present Wade, — was outside the door. His expression was as calmly attentive as it would have been were his master yawning after a healthy nap instead of screaming with all the tortures of the damned. As Braden hurried by, hardly knowing whither he went, the servant did something he had never done before in his life. He ventured to lay a detaining hand upon the arm of a superior.

"Did he ask you to — to do it, Master Braden?" he whispered hoarsely. The man's eyes were glazed with dread.

Braden stopped. At first he did not comprehend. Then Wade's meaning was suddenly revealed to him. He drew back, aghast.

"Good Lord, no! No, no!" he cried out.

"Well," said Wade deliberately, "he will, mark my words, sir. I don't mind saying to you, Mr. Braden, that he *depends* upon you."

"Are you crazy, Wade?" gasped Braden, searching the man's face with an intentness that betrayed his own fear that the prophecy would come true. Something had already told him that his grandfather would depend upon him for complete relief,— and it was that something that had gripped his heart when he entered the sick-room, and still gripped it with all the infernal tenacity of inevitableness.

He hurried on, like one hunted and in search of a place in which to hide until the chase had passed. At the foot of the stairs he came upon Murray, the butler.

"Mrs. Thorpe says that you are to go to your old room, Mr. Braden," said the butler. "Will you care for tea, sir, or would you prefer something a little stronger?"

"Nothing, Murray, thank you," replied Braden, cold with a strange new terror. He could not put aside the impression that Murray, the bibulous Murray, was also regarding him in the light of an executioner. Somewhere back in his memory there was aroused an old story about the citizens who sat up all night to watch for the coming of the hangman who was to do a grewsome thing at dawn. He tried to shake off the feeling, he tried to laugh at the fantastic notion that had so swiftly assailed him. "I think I shall go to my room. Call me, if I am needed."

He did not want to see Anne. He shrank from the

revelations that were certain to come from the ha
assed wife of the old man who wanted to die. As l
remounted the stairs, he was subtly aware that son
one opened a door below and watched him as he fle
He did not look behind, but he knew that the watch
was white-faced and pleading, and that she too w
counting on him for support.

An hour later, a servant knocked at his door. Tl
afternoon was far gone and the sky was overcast wi
sinister streaks of clouds that did not move, but hu
like vast Zeppelins over the harbour beyond: long, blu
black clouds with white bellies. Mournful clouds th
waited for the time to come when they could burst in
tears! He had been watching them as they crept
over the Jersey shores, great stealthy birds of ill-ome
giving out no sound yet ponderous in their flight. I
started at the gentle tapping on his door; a stran
hope possessed his soul. Was this a friendly hand th
knocked? Was its owner bringing him the word th
the end had come and that he would not be called up
to deny the great request? He sprang to the door.

"Dr. Bates is below, sir," said the maid. "I
would like to see you before he goes."

Braden's heart sank. "I'll come at once, Katie."

There were three doctors in the library. Dr. Bat
went straight to the point.

"Your grandfather, Braden, has a very short tin
to live. He has just dismissed us. Our services a
no longer required in this case, if I —"

"Dismissed you?" cried Braden, unbelievingly.

Dr. Bates smiled. "We can do nothing more fo
him, my boy. It is just as well that we should g
He —"

"But, my God, sir, you cannot leave him to die in —

"Have patience, my lad. We are not leaving him to die alone. By his express command, we are turning the case over to you. You are to be his sole —"

"I refuse!" shouted Braden.

"You cannot refuse,— you will not, I am sure. For your benefit I may say that the case is absolutely hopeless. Not even a miracle can save him. If you will give me your closest attention, I will, with Dr. Bray's support, describe his condition and all that has led up to this unhappy crisis. Sit down, my boy. I am your good friend. I am not your critic, nor your traducer. Sit down and listen calmly, if you can. You should know just what is before you, and you must also know that every surgeon who has been called in consultation expresses but one opinion. In truth, it is not an opinion that they venture, but an unqualified decision."

For a long time Braden sat as if paralysed and listened to the words of the fine old doctor. At last the three arose and stood over him.

"You understand everything now, Braden," said Dr. Bates, a tremor in his voice. "May God direct your course. We shall not come here again. You are not to feel that we are deserting you, however, for that is not true. We go because you have come, because you have been put in sole charge. And now, my boy, I have something else to say to you as an old friend. I know your views. Not I alone, but Dr. Bray and thousands of others, have felt as you feel about such things. There have been countless instances, like the one at hand, when we have wished that we might be faithless to the tenets of a noble profession. But we have never faltered. It is not our province to be merciful, if I may put it in that way, but to be conscientious.

It is our duty to save, not to destroy. That is what binds every doctor to his patient. Take the advice of an old man, Braden, and don't allow your pity to run away with your soul. Take my advice, lad. Let God do the deliberate killing. He will do it in his own good time, for all of us. I speak frankly, for I know you consider me your friend and well-wisher."

"Thank you, Dr. Bates," said Braden, hoarsely. "The advice is not needed, however. I am not a murderer. I could not kill that poor old man upstairs, no matter how dreadfully he suffers. I fear that you have overlooked the fact that I am an advocate, not a performer, of merciful deeds. You should not confuse my views with my practice. I advocate legalising the destruction of the hopelessly afflicted. Inasmuch as it is not a legal thing to do at present, I shall continue to practise my profession as all the rest of you do: conscientiously." He was standing before them. His face was white and his hands were clenched.

"I am glad to hear you say that, Braden," said Dr. Bates gently. "Forgive me. One last word, however. If you need me at any time, I stand ready to come to you. If you conclude to operate, I — I shall advise against it, of course,— you may depend upon me to be with you when you —"

"But you have said, Dr. Bates, that you do not believe an operation would be of —"

"In my opinion it would be fatal. But you must not forget that God rules, not we mortals. We do not know everything. I am frank to confess that there is not one among us who is willing to take the chance, if that is a guide to you. That's all, my boy. Good-bye. God be with you!"

They passed out of and away from the house.

CHAPTER XII

IN the course of the evening, desolated by the ugly responsibility that had been thrust upon him, Braden put aside his scruples, his antipathy, and sent word to Anne that he would like to discuss the new situation with her. She had not appeared for dinner, which was a doleful affair; she did not even favour him with an apology for not coming down. Distasteful as the interview promised to be for him, he realised that it should not be postponed. His grandfather's wife would have to be consulted. It was her right to decide who should attend the sick man. While he was acutely confident that she would not oppose his solitary attendance, there still struggled in his soul the hope that she might, for the sake of appearances at least, insist on calling in other physicians. It was a hope that he dared not encourage, however. Fate had settled the matter. It was ordained that he should stand where he now stood in this unhappy hour.

He recalled his grandfather's declaration that she still loved him. The thought turned him sick with loathing, for he believed in his heart that it was true. He knew that Anne loved him, and always would love him. But he also knew that every vestige of love and respect for her had gone out of his heart long ago and that he now felt only the bitterness of disillusionment so far as she was concerned. He was not afraid of her. She had lost all power to move a single drop of blood in his veins. But he was afraid *for* her.

She came downstairs at nine o'clock. He had not gone near the sick-room since his initial visit, earlier in

the day, literally obeying the command of the sick man to talk matters over with Anne before coming again to see him.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting," she said simply, as she advanced into the room. "I have been talking over the telephone with my mother. She does not come here any more. It has been nearly three weeks since she last came to see me. The dread of it all, don't you know. She is positive that she has all of the symptoms. I suppose it is a not uncommon fault of the imagination. Of course, I go to see her every afternoon. I see no one else, Braden, except good old Simmy Dodge. He stops in nearly every day to inquire, and to cheer me up if possible."

She was attired in a simple evening gown,— an old one, she hastily would have informed a woman visitor, — and it was hard for him to believe that this was not the lovely, riant Anne Tresslyn of a year ago instead of the hardened mistress of Templeton Thorpe's home. There was no sign of confusion or uncertainty in her manner, and not the remotest indication that her heart still owned love for him. If she retained a spark of the old flame in that beautiful body of hers, it was very carefully secreted behind a mask of indifference. She met his gaze frankly, unswervingly. Her poise was perfect,— marvellously so in the face of his ill-concealed antipathy.

"I suppose you know that I have been left in sole charge of the case," he said, without preface.

"Oh, yes," she replied calmly. "It was Mr. Thorpe's desire."

"And yours?"

"Certainly. Were you hoping that I would interpose an objection?"

"Yes. I am not qualified to take charge of —"

"Pardon me, Braden, if I remind you, that so far as Mr. Thorpe's chances for recovery are concerned, he might safely be attended by the simplest novice. The result would be the same." She spoke without a trace of irony. "Dr. Bates and the others were willing to continue, but what was the use? They do not leave you a thing to stand on, Braden. There is nothing that you can do. I am sorry. It seems a pity for you to have come home to this."

He smiled faintly, whether at her use of the word "home" or the prospect she laid down for him it would be difficult to say.

"Shall we sit down, Anne, and discuss the situation?" he said. "It is one of my grandfather's orders, so I suppose we shall have to obey."

She sank gracefully into a deep chair at the foot of the library table, and motioned for him to take one nearby. The light from the chandelier fell upon her brown hair, and glinted.

"It is very strange, Braden, that we should come into each other's lives again, and in this manner. It seems so long ago —"

"Is it necessary to discuss ourselves, Anne?"

She regarded him steadily. "Yes, I think so," she said. "We must at least convince ourselves that the past has no right to interfere with or overshadow what we may choose to call the present,— or the future, for that matter, if I may look a little farther ahead. The fact remains that we are here together, Braden, in spite of all that has happened, and we must make the best of it. The world,— our own little world, I mean,— will be watching us. We must watch ourselves. Oh, don't misconstrue that remark, please. We must see to it

that the world does not judge us entirely by our past." She was very cool about it, he thought,— and confident.

"As I said before, Anne, I see no occasion to —"

"Very well," she interrupted. "I beg your pardon. You asked me to see you to-night. What is it that you wish to say to me?"

He leaned forward in the chair, his elbows on the arms of it, and regarded her fixedly. "Has my grandfather ever appealed to you to — to —" He stopped, for she had turned deathly pale; she closed her eyes tightly as if to shut out some visible horror; a perceptible shudder ran through her slender body. As Braden started to rise, she raised her eye-lids, and in her lovely eyes he saw horror, dread, appeal, all in one. "I'm sorry," he murmured, in distress "I should have been more —"

"It's all right," she said, recovering herself with an effort. "I thought I had prepared myself for the question you were so sure to ask. I have been through hell in the past two weeks, Braden. I have had to listen to the most infamous proposals — but perhaps it would be better for me to repeat them to you just as they were made to me, and let you judge for yourself."

She leaned back in the chair, as if suddenly tired. Her voice was low and tense, and at no time during her recital did she raise it above the level at which she started. Plainly, she was under a severe strain and was afraid that she might lose control of herself.

It appeared that Mr. Thorpe had put her to the supreme test. In brief, he had called upon his young wife to put him out of his misery! Cunningly, he had beset her with the most amazing temptations. Her story was one of those incredible things that one cannot believe because the mind refuses to entertain the

utterly revolting. In the beginning the old man, consumed by pain, implored her to perform a simple act of mercy. He told her of the four little pellets and the glass of water. At that time she treated the matter lightly. The next day he began his sly, persistent campaign against what he was pleased to call her inhumanity; he did not credit her with scruples. There was something Machiavellian in the sufferer's scheming. He declared that there could be no criminal intent on her part, therefore her conscience would never be afflicted. The fact that he consented to the act was enough to clear her conscience, if that was all that restrained her. She realised that he was in earnest now, and fled the room in horror.

Then he tried to anger her with abuse and calumny to such an extent that she would be driven to the deed by sheer rage. Failing in this, he resumed his wheedling tactics. It would be impossible, he argued, for any one to know that she had given him the soothing poison. The doctors would always believe that he had overcome his prejudice against self-destruction and had taken the tablets, just as they intended and evidently desired him to do. But he would not take his own life. He would go on suffering for years before he would send his soul to purgatory by such an act. He believed in damnation. He had lived an honourable, upright life and he maintained that his soul was entitled to the salvation his body had earned for it by its resistance to the evils of the flesh. What, said he, could be more incompatible with a life-long observance of God's laws than the commission of an act for which there could be no forgiveness, what more terrible than going into the presence of his maker with sin as his guide and advocate? His last breath of life drawn in sin!

Day after day he whispered his wily arguments, and always she fled in horror. Her every hour was a nightmare, sleeping or waking. Her strength was shattered, yet she was compelled to withstand his daily attacks. He never failed to send for her to sit with him while the nurse took her exercise. He would have no one else. Ultimately he sought to tempt her with offers of gold! He agreed to add a codicil to his will, giving her an additional million dollars if she would perform a "simple service" for him. That was the way he styled it: a simple service! Merely the dropping of four little tablets into a tumbler of water and holding it to his lips to drain! Suicide with a distinction, murder by obligation! One of his arguments was that she would be free to marry the man she loved if he was out of the way. He did not utter the name of the man, however.

Anne spoke to no one of these shocking encounters in the darkened sick-room. She would not have spoken to Braden but for her husband's command given no later than the hour before that she should do so.

"Twice, Braden, I was tempted to do what he asked of me," she said in conclusion, almost in a whisper. "He was in such fearful agony. You will never know how he has suffered. My heart ached for him. I cannot understand how a good and gentle God can inflict such pain upon one of his creatures. Why should this Christian be crucified? But I must not say such things. Twice I came near to putting those tablets in the glass and giving it to him to drink, but both times I shrank even as I took them up from the table. I shall never forget the look of joy that came into his eyes when he saw me pick them up, nor shall I ever forget the look *he gave* me when I threw them down and put my fingers

to my ears to shut out the sound of his moans. It would have been so easy to end it all for him. No one could have known, and he would have died thanking me for one good deed at least. Yesterday when I failed him for the second time, he made the most horrible confession to me. He said that when he married me a year ago he knew that this very crisis would come and that he had counted on me then as his deliverer! He actually said to me, Braden, that all this was in his mind when he married me. Can't you understand? If the time ever came when he wanted to die, who would be more likely to serve his purpose than the young, avaricious wife who loved another man? Oh, he was not thinking of your good, my friend,— at least, not entirely. He did not want you to throw yourself away on me, that's true, but your preservation was not his sole object, let me assure you. He planned deeper than we knew. He looked ahead for one year and saw what was coming, and he counted on me,— he counted on the wife he had bought. Once he asked me if I had the faintest idea how many wives have killed strong and healthy husbands in order that they might wed the men they loved better. If murderesses can do that, said he, why should I hesitate, when there could be no such thing as murder in my — oh, it was too terrible! Thank God, he thinks better of me now than he did on the day he married me. Even though he is your grandfather, Braden, I can say to you frankly that if taking his own life means going to hell for him, I would see him in hell before I would —"

"Anne, Anne!" cried he, shaken. "Don't say it! It is too horrible. Think of what you were about to say and —"

"Oh, I've thought, my friend," she broke in fiercely.

"It is time for you to think of what he would have done for me. He would have sent me to hell in his place. Do you understand? Do you suppose that if I had killed him, even with mercy and kindness in my heart, I could ever have escaped from a hell on earth, no matter what God's judgment may have been hereafter? Would heaven after death affect the hell that came before?"

"Do you believe that there is life beyond the grave?" he demanded. "Do you still believe that there is a heaven and a hell?"

"Yes," she said firmly, "and down in your soul, Braden, you believe it too. We all believe it, even the scientists who scoff. We can't help believing it. It is that which makes good men and women of us, which keeps us as children to the end. It isn't honour or nobility of character that makes us righteous, but the fear of God. It isn't death that we dread. We shrink from the answer to the question we've asked all through life. Can you answer that question now?"

"Of course not," he said, "nor can I solve the riddle of life. That is the great mystery. Death is simple. We know why we die but we don't know why we live."

"The same mystery that precedes life also follows it," she said stubbornly. "The greatest scientist in the world was once a lifeless atom. He acknowledges that, doesn't he? So, my friend, there is something even vaster than the greatest of all intelligences, and that is ignorance. But we are wasting time. I have told you everything. You know just what I've been through. I don't ask for your sympathy, for you would be quite right in refusing to give it me. I made my bed, so there's the end of it. I am glad that you are here. The situation is in your hands, not mine."

"What is there for me to do except to sit down, like you, and wait?" he groaned, in desperation.

She was silent for a long time, evidently weighing her next remark. "What have you to say for your pet theory now, Braden?" she inquired, haltingly.

"You may rest assured, Anne, that even were it legally possible, I should not put it into practice in this instance," he said coldly.

Her face brightened. "Do you really mean it?"

"I wish you and all the rest of them would understand that I am not setting myself up as a butcher —" he began hotly.

"That is all I want to know," she cried, tremulously. "I have been dreading the — I have found myself wondering if *you* would give him those tablets. Look me straight in the eye, Braden. You will not do that, will you?"

"Never!" he exclaimed.

"You don't know what that means to me," she said in a low voice. Again there was a long silence. He was studying her face, and queer notions were entering his brain. "Another question, please, and that is all. Can his life be prolonged by an operation?"

"I am assured that he could not survive an operation."

"He may ask you to — to perform one," she said, watching him closely.

He hesitated. "You mean that he is willing to take the chance?"

"I mean that he realises it will make no difference, one way or the other. The other doctors have refused to operate."

"He will not ask me to operate," said Braden, but his soul shook within him as he spoke.

"We shall see," said she strangely, and then arose. She came quite close to him. "I do not want you to operate, Braden. Any one but you. You must not take the — the chance. Now you would better go up to him. Tell him you have talked with me. He will understand. He may even speak a good word for me. Good night. Thank you for — for letting me speak with you to-night."

She left the room. He stood quite still for a full minute, staring at the closed door. Then he passed his hand over his eyes as if to shut out the vision that remained. He knew now that his grandfather was right.

In the hall upstairs he found Wade.

"Time you were in bed," said Braden shortly. "Get a little rest, man. I am here now. You needn't worry."

"He's been asking for you, sir. The nurse has been out here twice within the last ten minutes. Excuse me, Mr. Braden; may I have another word with you?" He did not lower his voice. Wade's voice was of a peculiarly unpenetrating character. Unless one *observed* his speech it was scarcely audible, and yet one had a queer impression, at a glance, that he was speaking a little above the ordinary tone of voice. "Did Mrs. Thorpe tell you that her brother has been here to see Mr. Thorpe three times within a week?"

Braden started. "She did not, Wade."

"Why didn't she tell you, sir?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, sir, it is just this way: Mr. Thorpe sent for young Mr. Tresslyn last Friday afternoon. Considerable difficulty was had in finding him. He was just a wee bit tipsy when he got here at eight o'clock. Mrs.

Thorpe did not see him, although Murray went to her room to tell her of his arrival. Young Mr. Tresslyn was in Mr. Thorpe's room for ten or fifteen minutes, and then left the house in a great hurry, sir. He came again on Saturday evening, and acted very queerly. Both times he was alone with Mr. Thorpe. Again he fairly rushed out of the house as if he was pursued by devils. Then he came on Sunday night, and the same thing happened. As he was going out, I spoke to him, and this is what he said to me,— scared-like and shaking all over, sir,—'I'm not coming here again, Wade. No more of it for me. Damn him! You tell my sister that I'm not coming again!' Then he went out, mumbling to himself. Right after that I went up to Mr. Thorpe. He was very angry. He gave orders that Mr. Tresslyn was not to be admitted again. It was then, sir, that he spoke to me about the money in the envelope. I have had a notion, sir, that the money was first intended for Mr. George Tresslyn, but he didn't like that way of earning it any more than I did. Rather strange, too, when you stop to think how badly he needs money and how low he's been getting these past few months. Poor chap, he —"

"Now, Wade, you are guessing," interrupted Braden, with a sinking heart. "You have no right to surmise —"

"Beg pardon, sir; I was only putting two and two together. I'm sorry. I dare say I am entirely wrong, perhaps a little bit out of my head because of the — Please, sir, do not misunderstand me. I would not for the world have you think that I connect Mrs. Thorpe with the business. I am sure that she had nothing whatever to do with her brother's visits here,— nothing at all, sir."

Braden's blood was like ice water as he turned away from the man and entered his grandfather's room. The nurse was reading to the old man. With the young man's entrance, Mr. Thorpe cut her off brusquely and told her to leave the room.

"Come here, Braden," he said, after the door had closed behind the woman. "Have you talked with Anne?"

"Yes, grandfather."

"She told you everything?"

"I suppose so. It is terrible. You should not have made such demands —"

"We won't go into that," said the other harshly, gripping his side with his claw-like hand. His face was contorted by pain. After a moment, he went on: "She's better than I thought, and so is that good-for-nothing brother of hers. I shall never forgive this scoundrel Wade though. He has been my servant, my slave for more than thirty years, and I know that he hasn't a shred of a conscience. While I think of it, I wish you would take this key and unlock the top drawer in my dressing table. See if there is an envelope there, will you? There is, eh? Open it. Count the bills, Braden."

He lay back, with tightly closed eyes, while Braden counted the package of five hundred dollar bank-notes.

"There are fifty thousand dollars here, grandfather," said the young man huskily.

"'Pon my soul, they are more honest than I imagined. Well, well, the world is getting better."

"What shall I do with this money, sir? You shouldn't have it lying around loose with all these —"

"You may deposit it to my account in the Fifth *Avenue* Bank to-morrow. It is of absolutely no use

to me now. Put it in your pocket. It will be quite safe with you, I dare say. You are all so inexcusably honest, confound you. Sit down. I want to tell you what I've finally decided to do. These surgeons say there is about one chance in a million for me, my boy. I've decided to take it."

"Take it?" muttered Braden, knowing full well what was to come.

"I have given you the finest education, the finest training that any young man ever had, Braden. You owe a great deal to me, I think you will admit. Never mind now. Don't thank me. I would not trust my one chance to any of these disinterested butchers. They would not care a rap whether I pulled through or not. With you, it is different. I believe you would —"

"My God, grandfather, you are not going to ask me to —"

"Sit still! Yes, I am going to ask you to give me that one chance in a million. If you fail, I shall not be here to complain. If you succeed,— well, you will have performed a miracle. You —"

"But there is no possible chance,— not the slightest chance of success," cried Braden, the cold sweat running down his face. "I can tell you in advance that it means death to —"

"Nevertheless, it is worth trying, isn't it, my boy?" said Templeton Thorpe softly. "I demand it of you. You are my flesh and blood. You will not let me lie here and suffer like this for weeks and months. It is your duty to do what you can. It is your time to be merciful, my lad."

Braden's face was in his hands. His body was shaking as if in convulsions. He could not look into the old man's eyes.

"Send for Bates and Bray to-morrow. Tell them that you have decided to operate,— with my consent. They will understand. It must be done at once. You will not fail me. You will do this for your poor old granddaddy who has loved you well and who suffers to-day as no man in all this world has ever suffered before. I am in agony. Nothing stops the pain. Everything has failed. You *will* do this for me, Braden?"

The young man raised his haggard face. Infinite pity had succeeded horror in his eyes.

CHAPTER XIII

SIMMY DODGE emerged from Sherry's at nine-thirty. He was leaving Mrs. Fenwick's dinner-dance in response to an appeal from Anne Thorpe, who had sent for him by messenger earlier in the evening. Simmy was reluctant about going down to the house off Washington Square; he was constituted as one of those who shrink from the unwholesomeness of death rather than from its terrors. He was fond of Anne, but in his soul he was abusing her for summoning him to bear witness to the final translation of old Templeton Thorpe from a warm, sensitive body, into a cold, unpleasant hulk. He had no doubt that he had been sent for to see the old man die. While he would not, for the world, have denied Anne in her hour of distress, he could not help wishing that she had put the thing off till tomorrow. Death doesn't appear so ugly in the daytime. One is spared the feeling that it is stealing up through the darkness of night to lay claim to its prey.

Simmy shivered a little as he stood in front of Sherry's waiting for his car to come up. He made up his mind then and there that when it came time for him to die he would see to it that he did not do it in the night. For, despite the gay lights of the city, there were always sombre shadows for one to be jerked into by the relentless hand of death; there was something appalling about being dragged off into a darkness that was to be dissipated at sunrise, instead of lasting forever.

He left behind him in one of the big private dining-

rooms a brilliant, high-spirited company of revellers. One of Mrs. Fenwick's guests was Lutie Tresslyn. He sat opposite her at one of the big round tables, and for an hour he had watched with moody eyes her charming, vivacious face as she conversed with the men on either side of her. She was as cool, as self-contained as any woman at the table. There was nothing to indicate that she had not been born to this estate of velvet, unless the freshness of her cheek and the brightness of her eye betrayed her by contrast with the unmistakable haggardness of "the real thing."

She was unafraid. All at once Simmy was proud of her. He felt the thrill of something he could not on the moment define, but which he afterwards put down as patriotism! It was just the sort of thrill, he argued, that you have when the band plays at West Point and you see the cadets come marching toward you with their heads up and their chests out,— the thrill that leaves a smothering, unuttered cheer in your throat.

He thought of Anne Tresslyn too, and smiled to himself. This was Anne Tresslyn's set, not Lutie's, and yet here she was, a trim little warrior, inside the walls of a fortified place, hobnobbing with the formidable army of occupation and staring holes through the uniforms of the General Staff! She sat in the Tresslyn camp, and there were no other Tresslyns there. She sat with the Wintermills, and — yes, he had to admit it,— she had winked at him slyly when she caught his eye early in the evening. It was a very small wink to be sure and was not repeated.

The night was cold. His chauffeur was not to be found by the door-men who ran up and down the line from Fifth to Sixth Avenue for ten minutes before Simmy remembered that he had told the man not to

come for him until three in the morning, an hour at which one might reasonably expect a dance to show signs of abating.

He was on the point of ordering a taxi-cab when his attention was drawn to a figure that lurked well back in the shadows of the Berkeley Theatre down the street — a tall figure in a long ulster. Despite the darkness, Simmy's intense stare convinced him that it was George Tresslyn who stood over there and gazed from beneath lowered brows at the bright doorway. He experienced a chill that was not due to the raw west wind. There was something sinister about that big, motionless figure, something portentous of disaster. He knew that George had been going down the hill with startling rapidity. On more than one occasion he had tried to stay this downward rush, but without avail. Young Tresslyn was drinking, but he was not carousing. He drank as unhappy men drink, not as the happy ones do. He drank alone.

For a few minutes Simmy watched this dark sentinel, and reflected. What was he doing over there? What was he up to? Was he waiting for Lutie to come forth from the fortified place? Was there murder and self-murder in the heart of this unhappy boy? Simmy was a little man but he was no coward. He did not hesitate long. He would have to act, and act promptly. He did not dare go away while that menacing figure remained on guard. The police, no doubt, would drive him away in time, but he would come back again. So Simmy Dodge squared his shoulders and marched across the street, to face what might turn out to be a ruthless lunatic — the kind one reads about, who kill their best friends, " and all that sort of thing."

It was quite apparent that the watcher had been

observing him. As Simmy came briskly across the street, Tresslyn moved out of his position near the awning and started westward, his shoulders hunched upward and his chin lowered with the evident desire to prevent recognition. Simmy called out to him. The other quickened his steps. He slouched but did not stagger, a circumstance which caused Simmy a sharp twinge of uneasiness. He was not intoxicated. Simmy's good sense told him that he would be more dangerous sober than drunk, but he did not falter. At the second shout, young Tresslyn stopped. His hands were thrust deep into his overcoat pockets.

"What do you want?" he demanded thickly, as the dapper little man came up and extended his hand. Simmy was beaming, as if he suddenly had found a long lost friend and comrade. George took no notice of the friendly hand. He was staring hard, almost savagely at the other's face. Simmy was surprised to find that his cheeks, though sunken and haggard, were cleanly shaved, and his general appearance far from unprepossessing. In the light from a nearby window, the face was lowering but not inflamed; the eyes were heavy and tired-looking — but not blood-shot.

"I thought I recognised you," said Simmy glibly.

"Much obliged," said George, without the semblance of a smile.

Simmy hesitated. Then he laid his hand on George's arm. "See here, George, this will not do. I think I know why you are here, and — it won't do, old chap."

"If you were anybody else, Dodge, I'd beat your head off," said George slowly, as if amazed that he had not already done so. "Better go away, Simmy, and let me alone. I'm all right. I'm not doing any harm, am I, standing out here?"

"What do you gain by standing here in the cold and —"

"Never mind what I gain. That's my affair," said George, his voice shaking in spite of its forced gruffness.

Simmy was undaunted. "Have you been drinking to-night?"

"None of your damned business. What do you mean by —"

"I am your friend, George," broke in Simmy earnestly. "I can see now that you've had a drink or two, and you —"

"I'm as sober as you are!"

"More so, I fear. I've had champagne. You —"

"I am not drunk all of the time, you know," snarled George.

"Well, I'm glad to hear it," said Simmy cheerfully.

"I hate the stuff,— hate it worse than anything on earth except being sober. Good night, Simmy," he broke off abruptly.

"That dance in there won't be over before three o'clock," said Simmy shrewdly. "You're in for a long wait, my lad."

George groaned. "Good Lord, is it — is it a dance? The papers said it was a dinner for Lord and Lady —"

"Better come along with me, George," interrupted Simmy quietly. "I'm going down to Anne's. She has sent for me. It's the end, I fancy. That's where you ought to be to-night, Tresslyn. She needs you. Come —"

Young Tresslyn drew back, a look of horror in his eyes. "Not if I know myself," he muttered. "You'll never get me inside that house again. Why,— why,

it's more than I could stand, Simmy. That old man tried — but, never mind. I can't talk about it. There's one thing sure, though: I wouldn't go near him again for all the money in New York,— not I."

"I sha'n't insist, of course. But I do insist on your getting away from here. You are not to annoy Lutie. She's had trouble enough and you ought to be man enough to let her alone."

George stared at him as if he had not heard aright. "Annoy her? What the devil are you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talking about. Oh, don't glare at me like that. I'm not afraid of you, big as you are. I'm trying to put sense into your head, that's all, and you'll thank me for it later on, too."

"Why, I — I wouldn't annoy her for all the world, Simmy," said George, jerkily. "What do you take me for? What kind of a —"

"Then, why are you here?" demanded Simmy "It looks bad, George. If it isn't Lutie, who is it you're after?"

The other appeared to be dazed. "I'm not after any one," he mumbled. Suddenly he gripped Simmy by the shoulders and bent a white, scowling face down to the little man's level. "My God, Simmy, I — I can't help it. That's all there is to it. I just want to see her — just want to look at her. Can't you understand? But of course you can't. You couldn't know what it means to love a girl as I love her. It isn't in you. Annoy her? I'd cut my heart out first. What business is it of yours if I choose to stand out here all night just for a glimpse of her in all her happiness, all her triumph, all that she's got because she deserves it? Oh, I'm sober enough, so don't think it's that. Now, you let me alone. Get out of this, Simmy. I

know what I'm doing and I don't want any advice from you. She won't know I'm over here when she comes out of that place, and what she doesn't know isn't going to bother her. She doesn't know that I sneak around like this to get a look at her whenever it's possible, and I don't want her to know it. It would worry her. It might — frighten her, Simmy, and God knows I wouldn't harm her by word or deed for anything on earth. Only she wouldn't understand. D'you see?" He shook Simmy as a dog would have shaken a rat, not in anger but to emphasise his seriousness.

"By Jove, George,— I'd like to believe that of you," chattered Simmy.

"Well, you can believe it. I'm not ashamed to confess what I'm doing. You may call me a baby, a fool, a crank or whatever you like,— I don't care. I've just got to see her, and this is the only way. Do you think I'd spoil things for her, now that she's made good? Think I'd butt in and queer it all? I'm no good, I'm a rotter, and I'm going to the devil as fast as I know how, Simmy. That's my affair, too. But I'm not mean enough to begrudge her the happiness she's found in spite of all us damned Tresslyns. Now, run along, Simmy, and don't worry about anything happening to her,— at least, so far as I'm concerned. She'll probably have her work cut out defending herself against some of her fine gentlemen, some of the respectable rotters in there. But she'll manage all right. She's the right sort, and she's had her lesson already. She won't be fooled again."

Simmy's amazement had given way to concern. "Upon my word, George, I'm sorry for you. I had no idea that you felt as you do. It's too darned bad. I wish it could have been different with you two."

"It could have been, as I've said before, if I'd had the back-bone of a caterpillar."

"If you still love her as deeply as all this, why —"

"Love her? Why, if she were to come out here this instant and smile on me, Simmy, I'd — I'd — God, I don't know what I'd do!" He drooped his head dejectedly, and Simmy saw that he was shaking.

"It's too bad," said Simmy again, blinking. For a long time the two of them stood there, side by side, looking at the bright doorway across the street. Simmy was thinking hard. "See here, old fellow," he said at last, profoundly moved, "why don't you buck up and try to make something of yourself? It isn't too late. Do something that will make her proud of you. Do —"

"Proud of me, eh?" sneered George. "The only thing I could do would be to jump into the river with my hands tied. She'd be proud of me for that."

"Nonsense. Now listen to me. You don't want her to know that you've been put in jail, do you?"

"What am I doing that would get me into jail?"

"Loitering. Loafing suspiciously. Drinking. A lot of things, my boy. They'll nab you if you hang around here till three o'clock. You saw her go in, didn't you?"

"Yes. She — she happened to turn her face this way when she got to the top of the steps. Saying something to the people she was with. God, I — she's the loveliest thing in —" He stopped short, and put his hand to his eyes.

Simmy's grip tightened on George's arm, and then for five minutes he argued almost desperately with the younger man. In the end, Tresslyn agreed to go home. He would not go to Anne's.

"And you'll not touch another drop to-night?" said Dodge, as they crossed over to the line of taxi-cabs.

George halted. "Say, what's on your mind, Simmy? Are you afraid I'll go off my nut and create a scene,— perhaps mop up the sidewalk with some one like Percy Wintermill or — well, any one of those nuts in there? That the idea you've got? Well, let me set you right, my boy. If I ever do anything like that it will not be with Lutie as the excuse. I'll not drag her name into it. Mind you, I'm not saying I'll never smash some one's head, but —"

"I didn't mean that, at all," said Simmy.

"And you needn't preach temperance to me," went on George. "I know that liquor isn't good for me. I hate the stuff, as a matter of fact. I know what it does to a man who has been an athlete. It gets him quicker than it gets any one else. But the liquor makes me forget that I'm no good. It makes me think I'm the biggest, bravest and best man in the world, and God knows I'm not. When I get enough of the stuff inside of me, I imagine that I'm good enough for Lutie. It's the only joy I have, this thinking that I'm as decent as anybody, and the only time I think I'm decent is when I'm so damned drunk that I don't know anything at all. Tell him to take me to Meikelham's hotel. Good night. You're all right, Simmy."

"To Meikelham's? I want you to go home, George."

"Well, that's home for me at present. Rotten place, believe me, but it's the best I can get for a dollar a day," grated George.

"I thought you were living with your mother?"

"No. Kicked out. That was six weeks ago. Couldn't stand seeing me around. I don't blame her,

either. But that's none of your business, Simmy, so don't say another word."

"It's pretty rough, that's all."

"On me — or her?"

"Both of you," said Simmy sharply. "I say, come over and see me to-morrow afternoon, George,— at three o'clock. Sober, if you don't mind. I've got something to say to you —"

"No use, Simmy," sighed George.

"You are fond of Anne, aren't you?"

"Certainly. What's that got to do with it?"

"She may need you soon. You must be ready, that's all. See what I mean?"

"Moral support, eh?" scoffed George.

"You are her brother."

"Right you are," said the other soberly. "I'll be on hand, Simmy, if I'm needed. Tell Anne, will you? I'll stick it out for a few days if it will help her."

"There is a lot of good in you, George," said Simmy, engagingly. "I don't mind telling you that Lutie says the same thing about you. She has said to me more than once that —"

"Oh, don't lie to me!" snarled young Tresslyn, but Simmy did not fail to note the quickening of interest in his sullen eyes.

"More than once," he went on, following up the advantage, "she has expressed the opinion that with half a chance you would have been more than half a man."

"'Gad," said George, wonderingly, "I — I can almost believe you now. That's just the way she would have put it. God knows, Simmy, you are not smart enough to have said it out of your own head. She really thinks that, does she?"

"We'll talk it over to-morrow," said the other, quite

well pleased with himself. Young Tresslyn was breathing heavily, as if his great lungs had expanded beyond their normal capacity. "Move along now."

"If I thought —" began George, but Simmy had slammed the door and was directing the chauffeur where to take his fare.

Half an hour later, Mrs. Fenwick's tables were deserted and the dance was on. Simmy Dodge, awaiting the moment of dispersion, lost no time in seeking Lutie. He had delayed his departure for Anne's home, and had been chafing through a long half-hour in the lounge downstairs. She was dancing with Percy Wintermill.

"Hello, Dodge," said that young man, halting abruptly and somewhat aggressively when Simmy, without apology, clutched his arm as they swung by; "thought you'd gone. What d'you come back for?"

"I haven't gone, so I couldn't come back," answered Simmy easily. "I want a word or two with Mrs. Tresslyn, old boy, so beat it."

"Oh, I say, you've got a lot of cheek —"

"Come along, Mrs. Tresslyn; don't mind Percy. *This* is important." With Lutie at his side, he made his way through the crowd about the door and led her, wondering and not a little disturbed, into one of the ante-rooms, where he found a couple of chairs.

She listened to his account of the meeting with her former husband, her eyes fixed steadily on his homely little face. There was alarm at first in those merry eyes of hers, but his first words were reassuring. He convinced her that George was not bent on any act of violence, nor did he intend to annoy or distress her by a public encounter.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "he's gone off to

bed, and I am quite certain that he will not change his mind. I waited here to tell you about him, Lutie, because I felt you ought to be prepared in case he does come back and you happen to see him skulking around in —"

"This isn't news to me, Simmy," she said seriously. "A half dozen times in the past two weeks I have caught sight of him, always in some convenient spot where he could watch me without much prospect of being seen. He seems to possess an uncanny knowledge of my comings and goings. I never see him in the daytime. I felt sure that he would be outside this place to-night, so when I came in I made it a point to look up and down the street,— casually, of course. There was a man across the street. I couldn't be sure, but I thought it was George. It has been getting on my nerves, Simmy." Her hand shook slightly, but what he had taken for alarm was gone from her eyes. Instead they were shining brightly, and her lips remained parted after she had finished speaking.

"Needn't have any fear of him," said he. "George is a gentleman. He still worships you, Lutie,— poor devil. He'll probably drink himself to death because of it, too. Of course you know that he is completely down and out? Little more than a common bum and street loafer."

"He — he doesn't like whiskey," said she, after a moment.

"One doesn't have to like it to drink it, you know."

"He could stop it if he tried."

"Like a flash. But he isn't going to try. At least, not until he feels that it's worth while."

She looked up quickly. "What do you mean by that?" Without waiting for him to answer, she went

on: "How can you expect me to do anything to help him? I am sorry for him, but — but, heavens and earth, Simmy, I can't preach temperance to a man who kicked me out of his house when he was sober, can I?"

"You loved him, didn't you?"

She flushed deeply. "I — I — oh, certainly."

"Never have quite got over loving him, as a matter of fact," said he, watching her closely.

She drew a long breath. "You're right, Simmy. I've never ceased to care for him. That's what makes it so hard for me to see him going to the dogs, as you say."

"I said 'going to the devil,'" corrected Simmy resolutely.

She laid her hand upon his arm. Her face was white now and her eyes were dark with pain.

"I shiver when I think of him, Simmy, but not with dread or revulsion. I am always thinking of the days when he held me tight in those big, strong arms of his, — and that's what makes me shiver. I adored being in his arms. I shall never forget. People said that he would never amount to anything. They said that he was too strong to work and all that sort of thing. He didn't think much of himself, but I *know* he would have come through all right. He is the best of his breed, I can tell you that. Think how young he was when we were married! Little more than a boy. He has never had a chance to be a man. He is still a boy, puzzled and unhappy because he can't think of himself as anything but twenty,— the year when everything stopped for him. He's twenty-five now, but he doesn't know it. He is still living in his twenty-first year."

"I've never thought of it in that light," said Simmy, considerably impressed. "I say, Lutie, if you care

so much for him, why not—" He stopped in some confusion. Clearly he had been on the point of trespassing on dangerous ground. He wiped his forehead.

"I can finish it for you, Simmy, by answering the question," she said, with a queer little smile. "I want to help him,— oh, you don't know how my heart aches for him! — but what can I do? I am his wife in the sight of God, but that is as far as it goes. The law says that I am a free woman and George a free man. But don't you see how it is? The law cannot say that we shall not love each other. Now can it? It can only say that we are free to love some one else if we feel so inclined without being the least bit troubled by our marriage vows. But George and I are still married to each other, and we are still thinking of our marriage vows. The simple fact that we love each other proves a whole lot, now doesn't it, Simmy? We are divorced right enough,— South Dakota says so,— but we refuse to think of ourselves as anything but husband and wife, lover and sweetheart. Down in our hearts we loved each other more on the day the divorce was granted than ever before, and we've never stopped loving. I have not spoken a word to George in nearly three years — but I know that he has loved me every minute of the time. Naturally he does not think that I love him. He thinks that I despise him. But I don't despise him, Simmy. If he had followed his teachings he would now be married to some one else — some one of his mother's choosing — and I should be loathing him instead of feeling sorry for him. That would have convinced me that he was the rotter the world said he was when he turned against me. I tell you, Simmy, it is gratifying to know that the man you love is drinking himself to death because he's true to you."

"That's an extraordinary thing to say," said Simmy, squinting. "You are happy because that poor devil is —"

"Now don't say that!" she cried. "I didn't say I was happy. I said I was gratified — because he is true to me in spite of everything. I suppose it's more than you can grasp, Simmy,— you dear old simpleton." Her eyes were shining very brightly, and her cheeks were warm and rosy. "You see, it's my husband who is being true to me. Every wife likes to have that thing proved to her."

"Quixotic," said Simmy. "He isn't your husband, my dear."

"Oh, yes, he is," said Lutie earnestly. "Just as much as he ever was."

"The law says he is not."

"What are you trying to get me to say?"

"I may as well come to the point. Would you marry him again if he were to come to you,— now?"

"Do you mean, would I live with him again?"

"You couldn't do that without marrying him, you know."

"I am already married to him in the sight of God," said she, stubbornly.

"Good Lord! Would you go back to him without a ceremony of —"

"If I made up my mind to live with him, yes."

"Oh, I see. And may I inquire just what your state of mind would be if he came to you to-morrow?"

"You have got me cornered, Simmy," she said, her lip trembling. There was a hunted look in her eyes. "I— I don't know what I should do. I want him, Simmy,— I want my man, my husband, but to be perfectly honest with you, I don't believe he has sunk low

enough yet for me to claim the complete victory I desire."

"Victory?" gasped Simmy. "Do you want to pick him out of the gutter? Is that your idea of triumph over the Tresslyns? Are you —"

"When the time comes, Simmy," said she cryptically, "I will hold out my hand to him, and then we'll have a *real* man before you can say Jack Robinson. He will come up like a cork, and he'll be so happy that he'll stay up forever."

"Don't be too sure of that. I've seen better men than George stay down forever."

"Yes, but George doesn't want to stay down. He wants me. That's all he wants in this world."

"Do you imagine that he will come to you, crawling on his knees, to plead for forgiveness or —"

"By no means! He'd never sink so low as that. That's why I tell you that he is a man, a real man. There isn't one in a thousand who wouldn't be begging, and whining, and even threatening the woman if he were in George's position. That's why I'm so sure."

"What do you expect?"

"When his face grows a little thinner, and the Tresslyn in him is drowned, I expect to ask him to come and see me," she said slowly.

"Good Lord!" muttered Simmy.

She sprang to her feet, her face glowing. "And I don't believe I can stand seeing it grow much thinner," she cried. "He looks starved, Simmy. I can't put it off much longer. Now I must go back. Thank you for the warning. You don't understand him, but — thank you, just the same. I never miss seeing him when he thinks he is perfectly invisible. You see, Simmy, I too have eyes."

CHAPTER XIV

THE next afternoon but one Templeton Thorpe was on the operating table. In a private sitting-room on the third floor of the great hospital, three people sat waiting for the result — two women and a man. They were the Tresslyns, mother, son and daughter. There were unopened boxes of flowers on the table in the middle of the room. The senders of these flowers were men, and their cards were inside the covers, damp with the waters of preservation. They were for Anne Thorpe, and they were from men who looked ahead even as she had looked ahead. But the roses and orchids they sent were never to be seen by Anne Thorpe. They were left in the boxes with their little white envelopes attached, for Anne was not thinking of roses as she sat there by the window, looking down into the street, waiting for the word from upstairs,— the inevitable word. Later on the free wards would be filled with the fragrance of American Beauties, and certain smug gentlemen would never be thanked. No one had sent flowers to Templeton Thorpe, the sick man.

There had been a brief conference on the day before between Anne and Braden. The latter went to her with the word that he was to operate, provided she offered no objection.

"You know what an operation will mean, Anne," he said steadily.

"The end to his agony," she remarked. Outwardly she was calm, inwardly she shivered.

"It is absurd to say that he has one chance in a

million to pull through. He hasn't a single chance. I appreciate that fact and — so does he."

"You are willing to do this thing, Braden?"

"I am willing," he said. His face was like death.

"And if I should object, what then?" she asked, almost inaudibly.

"I should refuse to operate. I cannot pretend that an operation is the only means left to save his life. It is just the other way round. We are supposed to take extreme measures in extreme cases, but always with the idea of prolonging human life. In this instance, I am bound to tell you, that I don't believe there is a chance to save him. We must look the matter squarely in the face."

"You said that there was absolutely no chance." She leaned heavily against the table.

"I believe there is no chance, but I am not all-seeing, Anne. We never know,— absolutely. Miracles happen. They are not performed by man, however."

"Have you spoken to Dr. Bates?"

"Yes. He is coming to the hospital, to — to be with me."

"He will not attempt to prevent the operation?"

"No. He does not advise or sanction it, but he — understands."

"And you will be held responsible for everything?"

"I suppose so," said he bitterly.

She was silent for a long time. "I think I shall object to the operation, Braden," she said at last.

"For my sake and not for his, I take it," he said.

"I may as well give him the tablets myself, as to consent to your method of — of —" She could not finish the sentence.

"It isn't quite the same," he said. "I act with

the authority of the law behind me. You would be violating the law."

"Still you would be killing a fellow creature," she protested. "I — I cannot allow you to sacrifice yourself, Braden."

"You forget that I have no false notions as to the question of right and wrong in cases of this kind. I assure you that if I undertake this operation it will be with a single purpose in mind: to save and prolong the life of my patient. The worst you can say of me is that I am convinced beforehand that I shall fail. If I were to act upon the principles I advocate, I should not feel obliged to go through the travesty of an operation. The time may come when cases of this sort will be laid before a commission, and if in their judgment it is deemed humane to do so, a drug will be administered and the horrors that are likely to attend my efforts of to-morrow will be impossible. There is no such law to sustain me now, no commission, no decision by experts and familiars to back me up, so I can only obey the commands of the patient himself,— and do the best I can for him. He insists on having the operation performed — and by me. I am one of the family. I am his only blood relative. It is meet and just, says he, that I should be the one, and not some disinterested, callous outsider. That is the way he puts it, and I have not denied him."

"It is horrible," she moaned, shuddering. "Why do you ask me to consent? Why do you put it up to me?"

"You now place me in the position of the surgeon who advises a prompt — I mean, who says that an operation is imperative."

"But that isn't the truth. You do not advise it."

He drew a long breath. "Yes, I do advise it. There is no other way. I shall try to save him. I *do* advise it."

She left him and went over to the fireplace, where she stood with her back toward him for many minutes, staring into the coals. He did not change his position. He did not even look at her. His eyes were fixed on the rug near the closed door. There was a warm, soft red in that rare old carpet. Finally she turned to him.

"I shall not let you take all of the responsibility, Braden," she said. "It isn't fair. I shall not oppose you. You have my consent to go on with it."

"I assume all responsibility," he said, abruptly, almost gruffly.

"You are wrong there, Braden," she said, slowly. "My husband assumes the responsibility. It is his act, not yours. I shall always regard it in that light, no matter what may happen. It is his command."

He tried to smile. "Perhaps that is the right way to look at it," he said, "but it is a poor way, after all." For a full minute they stood looking into each other's eyes. "Then I shall go ahead with the — arrangements," he said, compressing his lips.

She nodded her head.

"Before I go any farther, Anne, I want to tell you what happened this morning when his lawyer was here. I sent for him. There is a clause in my grandfather's will bequeathing to me the sum of one hundred thousand dollars. I insisted that a codicil be added to the instrument, revoking that clause. My grandfather was obstinate at first. Finally he agreed to discuss the matter privately with Judge Hollenback. A couple of hours ago Wade and Murray witnessed the codicil which deprives me of any interest in my grand-

father's estate. I renounce everything. There will be no contest on my part. Not a penny is to come to me."

She stared at him. "You refuse to take what rightfully belongs to you? Now that *is* quixotic, Braden. You shall not —"

"The matter is closed, Anne. We need not discuss it," he said firmly. "I had to tell you, that's all. The reason should be obvious. You know, of course, that the bulk of his estate, apart from the amount to be paid to you —" She winced perceptibly —"aside from that amount is to go to various charities and institutions devoted to the betterment of the human race. I need not add that these institutions are of a scientific character. I wanted you to know beforehand that I shall profit in no way by the death of my grandfather." After a significant pause he repeated distinctly: "I shall profit *in no way*."

She lowered her eyes for an instant. "I think I understand, Braden," she said, looking up to meet his gaze unwaveringly. Her voice was low, even husky. She saw finality in his eyes.

"He seemed to feel that I ought to know of the clause I mention," explained Braden dully. "Perhaps he thought it would — it might be an inducement to me to — to go ahead. God! What a thought!"

"He allowed you to read it?"

"A copy, last night. The real instrument was produced to-day by Judge Hollenback at my request, and the change was made in the presence of witnesses."

"Where is it now?"

"Judge Hollenback took it away with him. That's all I know about it."

"I am sorry," she said, a queer glint in her eyes.

"Sorry he took it away with him, I mean. There is nothing I can do — now."

She sent for her mother that night. The next morning Simmy Dodge came down with George Tresslyn, who steadfastly refused to enter the house but rode to the hospital with his mother and sister in Simmy's automobile. Anne did not see Braden again after that momentous interview in the library. He had effaced himself.

Now she sat in the window looking down into the street, dull and listless and filled with the dread of the future that had once looked so engaging to her. The picture that avarice and greed had painted was gone. In its place was an honest bit of colour on the canvas, — a drab colour and noteless.

Mrs. Tresslyn, unmoved and apparently disinterested, ran idly through the pages of an illustrated periodical. Her furs lay across a chair in the corner of the room. They were of chinchilla and expressed a certain arrogance that could not be detached by space from the stately figure with the lorgnon. The year had done little toward bending that proud head. The cold, classic beauty of this youngish mother of the other occupants of the room was as yet absolutely unmarred by the worries that come with disillusionment. If she felt rebellious scorn for the tall disappointment who still bore and always would bear the honoured name of Tresslyn she gave no sign: if the slightest resentment existed in her soul toward the daughter who was no longer as wax in her hands, she hid the fact securely behind a splendid mask of unconcern. As for the old man upstairs she had but a single thought: an insistent one it was, however, and based itself upon her own dread of the thing that was killing him.

George Tresslyn, white-faced and awed, sat like a graven image, looking at the floor. He was not there because he wanted to be, but because a rather praiseworthy allegiance to Anne had mastered his repugnance. Somewhere in his benumbed intelligence flickered a spark of light which revealed to him his responsibility as the head of the family. Anne was his sister. She was lovely. He would have liked to be proud of her. If it were not for the millions of that old man upstairs he could have been proud of her, and by an odd reasoning, even more ashamed of himself than he was now. He was not thinking of the Thorpe millions, however, as he sat there brooding; he was not wondering what Anne would do for him when she had her pay in hand. He was dumbly praising himself for having refused to sell his soul to Templeton Thorpe in exchange for the fifty thousand dollars with which the old man had baited him on three separate occasions, and wishing that Lutie could know. It was something that she would have to approve of in him! It was rather pitiful that he should have found a grain of comfort in the fact that he had refused to kill a fellow man!

Anne took several turns up and down the room. There was a fine line between her dark, brooding eyes, and her nostrils were distended as if breathing had become difficult for her.

"I told him once that if such a thing ever happened to me, I'd put an end to myself just as soon as I knew," she said, addressing no one, but speaking with a distinctness that was startling. "I told him that one would be justified in taking one's life under such circumstances. Why should one go on suffering—"

"What are you saying, Anne?" broke in her mother sharply. George looked up, astonishment struggling to make its way through the dull cloud on his face.

Anne stopped short. For a moment she appeared to be dazed. She went paler than before, and swayed. Her brother started up from his chair, alarmed.

"I say, Anne old girl, get hold of yourself!" he exclaimed. "None of that, you know. You mustn't go fainting or anything like that. Walk around with me for a couple of minutes. You'll be all right in —"

"Oh, I'm not going to faint," she cried, but grasped his arm just the same.

"They always walked us around on the football field when we got woozy —"

"Go out and see if you can find out anything, George," said she, pulling herself together. "Surely it must be over by this time."

"Simmy's on the lookout," said George. "He'll let us know."

"Be patient, my dear," said Mrs. Tresslyn, wiping a fine moisture from her upper lip, where it had appeared with Anne's astounding observation. "You will not have to wait much longer. Be —"

Anne faced her, an unmistakable sneer on her lips. "I'm used to waiting," she said huskily.

"She has waited a year and more," said George aggressively, glowering at his mother. It was a significant but singularly unhappy remark.

For the first time in their lives, they saw their mother in tears. It was so incomprehensible that at first both Anne and her brother laughed, not in mirth, but because they were so stupefied that they did not know what they were doing, and laughter was the simplest means of expressing an acute sense of embarrassment.

Then they stood aloof and watched the amazing exposition, fascinated, unbelieving. It did not occur to either of them to go to the side of this sobbing woman whose eyes had always been dry and cold, this mother who had wiped away their tears a hundred times and more with dainty lace handkerchiefs not unlike the one she now pressed so tightly to her own wet cheeks. They could not understand this thing happening to her. They could not believe that after all their mother possessed the power to shed tears, to sob as other women do, to choke and snivel softly, to blubber inelegantly; they had always looked upon her as proof against emotion. Their mother was crying! Her back was toward them, evidence of a new weakness in her armour. It shook with the effort she made to control the cowardly, spasmodic sobs. And why was she in tears? What had brought this amazing thing to pass? What right had she to cry?

They watched her stupidly as she walked away from them toward the window. They were not unfeeling; they simply did not know how to act in the face of this marvel. They looked at each other in bewilderment. What had happened? Only the moment before she had been as cold and as magnificently composed as ever she had been, and now! Now she was like other people. She had come down to the level of the utterly commonplace. She was just a plain, ordinary woman. It was unbelievable.

They did not feel sorry for her. A second time, no doubt, would find them humanly sympathetic, troubled, distressed, but this first time they could only wonder, they could only doubt their senses. It would have been most offensive in them to have let her see they noticed anything unusual in her behaviour. At least

that is the way they felt about it in their failure to understand.

For five minutes Mrs. Tresslyn stood with her back to them. Gradually the illy-stifled sobs subsided and as they still looked on curiously, the convulsive heaving of her shoulders grew less perceptible, finally ceasing altogether. Her tall figure straightened to its full regal height; her chin went up to its normal position; her wet handkerchief was stuffed, with dignified deliberateness, into the gold mesh bag. A minute more to prove that she had completely mastered her emotions, and then she faced her children. It was as if nothing had happened. She was the calm and imperious mother they had always known. Involuntarily, Anne uttered a deep sigh of relief. George blinked his eyes and also fell to wondering if they had served him honestly, or if, on the other hand, he too had merely imagined something incredible.

They did not question her. The incident was closed. They were never to ask her why she had wept in their presence. They were never to know what had moved her to tears. Instinctively and quite naturally they shrank from the closer intimacy that such a course would involve. Their mother was herself once more. She was no longer like other women. They could not be in touch with her. And so they were never to know why she had cried. They only knew that for a brief space she had been as silly as any ordinary mortal could be, and they were rather glad to have caught her at it.

Years afterward, however, George was to say to Anne: "Queer thing, wasn't it, that time she cried? Do you remember?" And Anne was to reply: "I've never forgotten it. It *was* queer."

Nor did Mrs. Tresslyn offer the slightest explanation for her conduct. She did not even smile shamefacedly, as any one else certainly would have done in apology. She was, however, vaguely pleased with her children. They had behaved splendidly. They were made of the right stuff, after all! She had not been humbled.

Apathy was restored. George slumped down in his chair and set his jaws hard. Mrs. Tresslyn glanced idly through the pages of a magazine, while Anne, taking up her position once more at the window, allowed her thoughts to slip back into the inevitable groove. They were not centred upon Templeton Thorpe as an object of pity but as a subject for speculation: she was thinking of the thing that Braden was doing, and of his part in this life and death affair. She was trying to picture him up there in that glaring little room cutting the life out of a fellow creature under the very eyes of the world.

The door was opened swiftly but softly. Simmy Dodge, white as a sheet, came into the room. . . . Mrs. Tresslyn went over to the window, where Anne was sitting, white and dry-eyed.

"It is no more than we expected, dear," said she quietly. "He had no chance. You were prepared. It is all over. You ought to be thankful that his sufferings are over. He —"

Anne was not listening. She broke in with a question to Simmy.

"What was it that you said happened while you were in the room? Before the ether, I mean. Tell me again,— and slowly."

Simmy cleared his throat. It was very tight and dry. He was now afraid of death.

"It was awfully affecting," he said, wiping the moisture from his brow. "Awfully. That young interne fellow told me about it. Just before they gave the ether, Mr. Thorpe shook hands with Brady. He was smiling. They all heard him say 'Good-bye, my boy, — and thank you.' And Brady leaned over and kissed him on the forehead. The chap couldn't quite hear, but says he thinks he whispered, 'Good-bye, granddaddy.' Awfully affecting scene —"

"'Good-bye, granddaddy,'" Anne repeated, dully. Then she covered her eyes with her hands.

Simmy fidgeted. He wanted to help, but felt oddly that he was very much out of place. George's big hand gripped his arm. At any other time he would have winced with pain, but now he had no thought for himself. Moreover, there was something wonderfully sustaining in the powerful hand that had been laid upon his.

"She ought not to take it so hard, George," he began.

"They told you he never came out of the anæsthetic," said George, in a half-whisper. "Just died — like that?"

"That's what he said. Little chap with blond hair and nose-glasses. You remember seeing him — Yes, he told me. He was in there. Saw it all. Gosh, I don't see how they can do it. This fellow seemed to be very much upset, at that. He looked scared. I say, George, do you know what the pylorus is?"

"Pylorus? No."

"I wish I knew. This fellow seemed to think that Brady made some sort of a mistake. He wouldn't say much, however. Some sort of a slip, I gathered. Something to do with the pylorus, I know. It must be a vital spot."

CHAPTER XV

THE day after the funeral, George Tresslyn called to see his sister. He found that it required a new sort of courage on his part to enter the house, even after his hesitation about pressing the door-bell. He was not afraid of any living man, and yet he was oppressed by the uncanny fear that Templeton Thorpe was still alive and waiting somewhere in the dark old house, ready to impose further demands upon his cupidity. The young man was none too steady beforehand, and now he was actually shaking. When Murray opened the door, he was confronted by an extremely pallid visitor who shot a furtive look over his head and down the hall before inquiring whether Mrs. Thorpe was at home.

"She is, Mr. George," said Murray. "You telephoned half an hour ago, sir."

"So I did," said George nervously. He was not offended by Murray's obvious comment upon his unstable condition, for he knew — even though Murray did not — that no drop of liquor had passed his lips in four days.

"Mrs. Thorpe is expecting you."

"Is she alone, Murray?"

"Yes, sir. Would you mind stepping inside, sir? It's a raw wind that is blowing. I think I must have taken a bit of a cold yesterday during — ahem! Thank you, sir. I will tell Mrs. Thorpe that you are here." Murray was rather testy. He had been imbibing.

George shivered. "I say, Murray, would you mind

giving me a drop of something to warm me up? I —"

The butler regarded him fixedly, even severely. "You have had quite enough already, sir," he said firmly, but politely.

"Oh, come now! I haven't had a drink in God knows how long. I — but never mind! If that's the way you feel about it, I withdraw my request. Keep your darned old brandy. But let me tell you one thing, Murray; I don't like your impertinence. Just remember that, will you?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Murray, unoffended. He was seeing with a clearer vision. "You are ill. I mistook it for —"

"No, I'm not ill. And I'll forgive you, too, Murray," he added impulsively. "I daresay you were justified. My fame has preceded me. Tell Mrs. Thorpe I'm here, will you? Run along; the decanter is quite safe."

A few minutes later he was ushered into Anne's sitting-room upstairs. He stopped short just inside the door, struck by the pallor, the haggardness of his sister's face.

"Oh, I say, Anne!" he exclaimed. "You're not taking it so hard as all this, I hope. My Lord, girlie, you look — you look — why, you can't possibly feel like this about him. What the deuce are —"

"Close the door, George," she commanded. Her voice sounded hollow, lifeless to him. She was sitting bolt upright on the huge, comfortable couch in front of the grate fire. He had dreaded seeing her in black. She had worn it the day before. He remembered that she had worn more of it than seemed necessary to him. It had made her appear clumsy and over-fed. He was immensely relieved to find that she now wore a rose-

coloured pignoir, and that it was wrapped very closely about her slim, long figure, as if she were afflicted by the cold and was futilely trying to protect her shivering flesh. He shuffled across the room and sat down beside her. "I'm glad you came. It is — oh, it is horribly lonely here in this dreadful house. You —"

"Hasn't mother been down to see you?" he demanded. "She ought to be here. You need her. Confound it, Anne, what sort of a woman is —"

"Hush! She telephoned. I said that I preferred to be alone. But I'm glad you came, George." She laid her hand on his. "You are able to feel sorry for me. Mother isn't."

"You're looking awfully seedy, Anne. I still say she ought to be here to look after you. It's her place."

"I'm all right. Of course, I look like the dickens, but who wouldn't? It has been terrible. Weeks and weeks of it. You'll never know what —" She shuddered so violently that he threw his arm about her and drew her close.

"Well, it's all over now, girlie. Brace up. Sunshine from now on. It was a bad day's work when you let yourself in for it, but that's all over now."

"Yes, it's all over," she said slowly. "Everything's all over." Her wide, sombre eyes fixed their gaze upon the rippling blue flames in the grate.

"Well, smile a little. It's time some one of us Tresslyns had a chance to grin a little without bearing it."

She raised her eyes and slowly inspected this big brother of hers. Seemingly she had not taken him in as a whole up to that moment of consideration. A slight frown appeared on her brow.

"I've been hearing rather bad things about you, George," she said, after a moment. "Now that I look

at you, you do look pretty shaky,— and pretty well threshed out. Is it true? Have you been as bad as they say?"

He flushed. "Has Simmy Dodge been talking?"

"Simmy is your friend, George," she said sharply.

"It's always a fellow's friends who do the most talking," said he, "and that's what hurts. You don't mind what your enemies say."

"Simmy has not mentioned your name to me in weeks."

"Well, I don't call that being friendly. He knows everything. He ought to have told you just how rotten I've been, because you could believe Simmy. You can't believe every one, Anne, but I know Simmy would give it to you straight. Yes, I've been all that could be expected. The only thing I haven't been is a liar."

"Can't you brace up, George? You are really the best of the lot, if you only knew it. You —"

"I don't drink because I like it, you know, Anne," he said earnestly.

"I see," she said, nodding her head slowly. "You drink because it's the surest way to prove to Lutie that you are still in love with her. Isn't that it?" She spoke ironically.

"When I think how much you would have liked Lutie if she'd had a chance to —"

"Don't tell it to me, George," she interrupted. "I didn't in the least care whom you married. As a matter of fact, I think you married the right girl."

"You do?" he cried eagerly.

"Yes. But she didn't marry the right man. If you had been the right man and had been taken away from her as you were, she would have died of a broken heart long before this. Logic for you, isn't it?"

"She's got too much sense to die of a broken heart. And that isn't saying she wasn't in love with me, either."

"Oh, well," she sighed, "it doesn't matter. She didn't die, she didn't go to the bad, she didn't put on a long face and weep her eyes out,— as I recall them they were exceedingly pretty eyes, which may account for her determination to spare them,— and she didn't do anything that a sensible woman would have done under the circumstances. A sensible woman would have set herself up as a martyr and bawled her eyes out. But Lutie, being an ignoramus, overlooked her opportunities, and now see where she is! I am told that she is exasperatingly virtuous, abstemious and exceedingly well-dressed, and all on an income derived from thirty thousand dollars that came out of the Tresslyn treasure chest. Almost incomprehensible, isn't it? Nothing sensible about Lutie, is there?"

"Are you trying to be sarcastic, Anne?" demanded George, contriving to sit up a little straighter on the sofa. He was not in the habit of exerting himself in these days of unregeneration. Anne was always smarter than he; he never knew just how much smarter she was but he knew when to feel apprehensive.

"You wanted to see me, George," she said abruptly. "What is it you want? Money?"

He scowled. "I might have known you would ask that question. No, I don't want money. I could have had some of old man Thorpe's money a couple of weeks ago if I'd been mean enough to take it, and I'm not mean enough to take it now — from you. I want to talk to you about Braden Thorpe."

For a moment or two Anne looked into his frowning eyes, and then she drew back into the corner of the couch, a queer shudder running through her body.

"About Braden?" she asked, striving to make her voice sound firm and unstrained.

"Where is he? Staying here in the house?"

"Of course not. I don't know where he is. He has not been near me since — since the day before —" She spoke rapidly, jerkily, and did not deem it necessary to complete the sentence.

George had the delicacy to hesitate. He even weighed, in that brief instant, the advisability of saying what he had come to say to her. Then a queer sense of duty, of brother to sister, took the place of doubt. She was his sister and she needed him now as never before, needed him now despite his self-admitted worthlessness.

"See here, Anne, I'm going to speak plainly," he blurted out, leaning forward. "You must not see Brady Thorpe again. If he comes here, you must refuse to receive him."

Her eyes were very dark and lustreless against the increased pallor of her cheeks. "He will not come here, George," she said, scarcely above a whisper. She moistened her lips. "It isn't necessary to — to warn me."

"Mind you, I don't say a word against him," he made haste to explain. "It's what people will say that troubles me. Perhaps you don't know what they are going to say, Anne, but I do."

"Oh, I know what they will say," she muttered. She looked straight into his eyes. "They will say that he killed his grandfather — purposely."

"It doesn't matter that they say he killed his grandfather, Anne," said he slowly, "so much as that he killed your husband. That's the point."

"What have you heard, George?" she asked, in dread of his reply.

"Barely enough to let me understand that where one man is talking now, a hundred will be talking next week. There was a young doctor up there in the operating room. He doesn't say it in so many words, but he suspects that it wasn't an accidental slip of the —don't look like that, Anne! Gee, you looked awfully scary just then." He wiped his brow. "I — I thought you were about to faint. I say, we'll drop the matter this instant if —"

"I'm not going to faint," she exclaimed. "You need not be afraid. What is it that this young doctor says? And how do you happen to have heard —"

"It's what he said to Simmy," interrupted George, quickly. "Simmy let it slip last night. I was in his apartment. Then I made him tell me the whole thing. He says it is certain that if this young fellow saw anything wrong, the others also did. And you know there were three pretty big surgeons there looking on. Bates and those other fellows, you remember. It — it looks bad, Anne. That's why I tell you that you must not see Brady again."

"And what has all this to do with my not seeing Braden again?" she demanded steadily.

He stared. "Why,— why, you just mustn't, that's all. Can't you understand?"

"You mean that I ought not to be put in the position of sharing the blame with him. Is that it?"

"Well, if there should be a — er — criminal investigation, you'd be a blamed sight better off if you kept

out of it, my girl. And what's more to the point, you can't afford to have people say that you are determined to do the thing they believe you set out to do in the beginning,—and that is to marry Braden as soon as —'

"Stop right there, George!" she cried hotly "Other people may say what they please, but the same privilege is not extended to you. Don't forget that you are my brother."

"I'm sorry, Anne. I didn't mean it in that way Of course, I know that it's all over between you and Brady. Just the same, I mean what I say when I advise you to see nothing of him. I've given you the hint, that's all."

"And I am sorry I spoke as I did just now," she said listlessly. "Thanks, George. You are looking out for me, aren't you? I didn't expect it. Somehow, I've always felt that nobody cared whether I —

"I'll look out for you as long as I'm able to stand," said he, setting his jaw. "I wish you could love me Anne. I think we'd be pretty good pals, after all, if we got to thinking more about each other and less about ourselves. Of course, I'm a down-and-outer and don't deserve much in the way of —"

"You don't deserve sympathy," she interrupted, laying a firm hand upon his, "and I know you are not asking for it. Encouragement is what you need." Her voice shook slightly. "You want some one to love you. I understand. It's what we all want, I suppose. I'll try to be a real, true sister from now on, George. It — it will not be very hard for me to love you, I'm sure," she concluded, with a whimsical little smile that went straight to his sore, disfigured heart. A lump came into his throat and his eyes began to smart so suddenly that a mist came over them before he could blink

his lids. He was very young, was George Tresslyn, despite the things that go to make men old.

"Gee!" he said, astonished by his own emotions. Then he gripped her slender, ringless hand in his huge palm,— and was further surprised to discover that she did not wince. "We're not acting like Tresslyns at all, Anne. We're acting just like regular people."

"Do you know that you are a very lucky person, George?" she said abruptly. He blinked. "You don't know it, but you are. I wish I had the same chance that you have."

"What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"I wish I had the same chance to be happy that you have."

"Happy? Good Lord, I'll never be happy without Lutie, and you know it," he groaned.

"That is just the chance you still have, Buddy. It isn't inconceivable that you may get Lutie back, while I—well, you know how it is with me. I'm done for, to put it plainly."

"Lutie wouldn't wipe her feet on me," he said, struggling between hope and conviction. "I'd let her do it like a flash if she wanted to, but — Oh, what's the use! You and I have queered ourselves forever, you with Brady and I with Lutie. It's an infernal shame you didn't take Brady when you —"

"Yes, we've queered ourselves," said she, struck by the phrase that fell from his lips. It was not Anne's habit to use slang, but somehow George's way of putting the situation into words was so aggravatingly complete that she almost resented his prior use of an expression that she had never used before in her life. It *did* sum up the business, neatly and compactly. Strange that she had never thought of that admirable

word before! "And of the two of us, George, I am the worst offender. I went about my mistake deliberately. I suppose it is only right that I should pay the heavier price."

"If I thought there was a chance to get Lutie back, I'd —" But there he stopped as he always stopped. He had never been able to end that sentence, and he had got just that far with it a million times or more.

"Have you tried to get her back?" she demanded suddenly, a flash of interest in her eyes. It was to grow into genuine enthusiasm. The impulse at the back of her mind was to develop into an idea, later into a strong, definite purpose. It had for its foundation a hitherto unsuspected desire to do good.

"Great Scot, no!"

"Then *try*, George," she cried, a new thrill in her voice.

He was bewildered. "Try what?"

"I would stake my life on it, George, if you set about it in the right way you can win Lutie all over again. All you have to do is to let her see that you are a man, a real man. There's no reason in the world why she shouldn't remember what love really is, and that she once had it through you. There's a lot in love that doesn't come out in a couple of months and she has the sense to know that she was cheated out of it. If I am not greatly mistaken she is just like all other women. We don't stop loving before we get our fill of it, or until we've at least found out that it bores us to be loved by the man who starts the fire going. Now, Lutie must realise that she never got her full share. She wasn't through loving you. She had barely begun. It doesn't matter how badly a woman is treated, she goes on loving her man until some other man proves

that she is wrong, and he cannot prove it to her until she has had all of the love that she can get out of the first man. That's why women stick to the men who beat them. Of course, this doesn't apply to unmoral women. You know the kind I mean. But it is true of all honest women, and Lutie appears to be more honest than we suspected. She had two or three months of you, George, and then came the crash. You can't tell me that she stopped wanting to be loved by you just as she was loving you the hardest. She may some day marry another man, but she will never forget that she had you for three months and that they were not enough."

"Great Scot!" said George once more, staring open-mouthed at his incomprehensible sister. "Are you in earnest?"

"Certainly."

"Why, she ought to despise me."

"Quite true, she should," said Anne coolly. "The only thing that keeps her from despising you is that uncompleted honeymoon. It's like giving a starving man just half enough to eat. He is still hungry."

"Do you mean to say that you'd like to see me make it up again with Lutie? You'd like to have me marry her again?"

"Why not? I'd find some happiness in seeing you happy, I suppose. I dare say it is self interest on my part, after all. In a way, it makes for my happiness, so therein I am selfish."

"Bosh! You'll be happy, Anne, but not through me. You are the prettiest girl in New York, one of the richest, one of the smartest —"

"See here, George," she said, a hard note stealing into her voice, "you and I are pretty much alike in

one respect. Surprising as it may seem, we have been able to love some one besides ourselves. And still more surprising, we appear to be constant. You are no more constant in your love for Lutie than I am in my love for the man I shall never have. My man despises me. Your woman merely pities you. You can retake what you have lost. I cannot. But why shouldn't I go on loving my man, just as you are loving your woman? Why shouldn't I?" she cried out fiercely.

He gulped. "Oh, I say, Anne, I — I didn't dream that it meant so much to you. I have always thought of you as — as — er — sort of indifferent to — But, that just shows how little a fellow knows about his sister. A sister never seems to be given the same flesh and blood feelings that other women have. I'm sorry I said what I did a little while ago. I take it back, Anne. If you've got a chance to get Brady back —"

"Stop! I spoke of your affairs, George, because they are not altogether hopeless. We cannot discuss mine."

"And as for that story, who is going to prove that Braden intentionally —" He checked the words, and switched off along another line. "Even though he did put a merciful end to Mr. Thorpe's suffering, what selfish motive can be charged to him? Not one. He doesn't get a dollar of the estate, Simmy says. He alone loved that old man. No one else in the world loved him. He did the best he could for him, and he doesn't care what any one thinks about it. I came here to warn you, to tell you to be careful, but now that I know what it means to you, I —"

She arose. Facing him, she said slowly, deliberately. "I believe that Braden tried to save his grandfather's life. He asked my consent to the operation. I gave

it. When I gave it, I was morally certain that Mr. Thorpe was to die on the operating table. I wanted him to die. I wanted an end put to his suffering. But I did not want Braden to be the one. Some day I may have the courage to tell you something, George, that will shock you as nothing on earth has ever shocked you. I will tell you the real reason why Templeton Thorpe married me. I — but not now. I wish that the whole world could know that if Braden did take his own way to end the suffering of that unhappy old man, I have no word of condemnation for him. He did the humane thing."

George remained seated, watching her with perplexed, dubious eyes. It was a matter that deserved mental concentration. He could best achieve this by abstaining from physical indulgence. Here was his sister, the wife of the dead man, actually condoning an act that was almost certain to be professionally excoriated, — behind the hand, so to say, — even though there was no one to contend that a criminal responsibility should be put upon Braden Thorpe. He was, for the moment, capable of forgetting his own troubles in considering the peril that attended Anne.

"Oh, I say, Anne, you'll have to be careful what you say. It's all right to say it to me, but for heaven's sake don't go telling these things to other people." He was serious, desperately serious. "No one will understand. No one will see it as you do. There has been a lot of talk about Brady's views and all that. People are not very charitable toward him. They stick to the idea that God ought to do such jobs as Brady advocates, and I don't know but they are right. So now you just keep your mouth closed about all this.

It is Braden's affair, it's his lookout, not yours. The least said, the better, take it from me. You —"

"We will talk of something else, George, if you don't mind," she said, relaxing suddenly. She sat down beside him once more, rather limply and with a deep, long-drawn sigh, as if she had spent herself in this single exposition of feeling. "Now what do you intend to do in regard to Lutie? Are you ready to straighten up and make the effort to — to be something creditable to yourself and to her?"

"Oh, I've tried to hold down a good many respectable jobs," he scoffed. "It's no good trying. I'm too busy thinking of her to be able to devote much of my remarkable intelligence to ordinary work."

"Well, you've never had me behind you till now," she said. "I am perfectly able to think for you, if you'll let me. Simmy Dodge is interested in you. He can get you a berth somewhere. It may be a humble one, but it will lead to something better. You are not a drunkard, you are not a loafer. Now, I will tell you what I intend to do. If, at the end of a year, you can show me that you —"

"Hold on! You are not thinking of offering me money, are you?" he demanded, flushing angrily.

Her eyes brightened. "You would not accept it?"

"No," he said flatly.

"You must remember one thing, George," she said, after a moment. "You cannot take Lutie back until you have paid mother in full for all that your freedom cost her. It wouldn't be fair to take both the girl and the money she received for giving you up that time. She was paid in full for returning you to the family circle. If she takes you back again, she should refund

the money, even though she is accepting damaged and well-worn goods. Now, Lutie should not be called upon to make restitution. That is for you to do. I fancy it will be a long time before you can amass thirty or forty thousand dollars, so I make you this offer: the day you are *good* enough for Lutie to marry all over again, I will pay to mother for you the full amount that Lutie would owe her in violating the contract. You will not receive a cent of it, you see. But you understand how rotten it would be for you and Lutie to —"

"I see, I see," cried he, striking his knee with his clenched hand. "We couldn't do it, that's all. It's awfully good of you, Anne, to do this for me. I'll — I'll never forget it. And I'll pay you back somehow before we're through, see if I don't." He was already assuming that the task of winning back Lutie was joyously on the way to certain consummation.

"I am a rich woman," said Anne, compressing her lips. "I sha'n't miss a few dollars, you know. Tomorrow I am to go with Mr. Hollenback to the safety vaults. A fortune will be placed in my hands. The deal will be closed."

"It's a lot of money," said George, shaking his head gloomily. It was as if he had said that it was money she shouldn't speak of with pride. "I say, Anne, do you know just how mother is fixed for money? Last winter she told me she might have to sell the house and —"

"I know," said Anne shortly. "I intend to share the spoils with her, in a way, even though she can't share the shame with me. She brought us up, George, and she made us the noble creatures that we are. We owe her something for that, eh? Oh, I am not as

bitter as I appear to be, so don't look shocked. Mother has her ideals, and she is honest about them. She is a wonderful woman, a wonderful mother. She did her best for us in every way possible. I don't blame her for what has happened to me. I blame myself. She is not half as mean as I am, George, and she isn't one-tenth as weak-kneed as you. She stood by both of us, and I for one shall stand by her. So don't you worry about mother, old boy. Worry about the honest job you are expected to get — and hold."

Later on she said to him: "Some day I shall make it a point to see Lutie. I will shake hands with her. You see, George dear," she went on whimsically, "I don't in the least object to divorcees. They are not half as common as divorces. And as for your contention that if you and Lutie had a child to draw you together, I can only call your attention to the fact that there are fewer divorces among people who have no children than among those who have. The records — or at least the newspapers — prove that to be a fact. In nine-tenths of the divorce cases you read about, the custody of children is mentioned. That should prove something, eh? It ought to put at rest forever the claim that children bind mismated people together. They don't, and that is all there is about it."

George grinned in his embarrassment. "Well, I'll be off now, Anne. I'll see Simmy this afternoon, as you suggest, and —" he hesitated, the worried look coming into his eyes once more — "Oh, I say, Anne, I can't help repeating what I said about your seeing Braden. Don't —"

"Good-bye, George," she broke in abruptly, a queer smile on her lips.

CHAPTER XVI

BRADEN THORPE realised that he would have to pay, one way or another, for what had happened in the operating room. Either his honour or his skill would be attacked for the course his knife had taken.

The day after his grandfather's death, he went to the office of Dr. Bates, the deposed family physician and adviser. He did not go in a cringing, apologetic spirit, but as one unafraid, as one who is justified within himself and fears not the report of evil. His heart was sore, for he knew he was to be misjudged. Those men who looked on while he worked so swiftly, so surely, so skilfully in that never-to-be-forgotten hour, were not to be deceived. He knew too well that he had performed with the most noteworthy skill, and, if he had any other feeling than that of grief for the death of one who had been dear to him, it was that of pride in the consciousness that he deserved the praise of these men for the manner in which he performed the most delicate of operations. He knew that they knew, quite as well as he, that but for the fatal swerving of half an inch of the instrument in his steady fingers, Templeton Thorpe would not only be alive at that moment but conceivably might be expected to survive for many days.

They had seen everything and they understood. He did not seek to conceal the truth from himself. He had heard the sharply drawn breath that was taken through the parted lips of his tense observers as that admirably handled blade slid from its true course and spoiled what might have been heralded as a marvellous feat in surgery.

It was as if something had snapped in the minds of these three men who watched. They had looked, however, upon all that was before him as he worked. They had seen, as he saw, the thing that no human skill could conquer. He felt their eyes upon him as he turned the knife quickly, suddenly, surely, and then they had looked into his eyes as he raised them for a second. He had spared his grandfather another month of agony, and they had seen everything. It was not unlikely that the patient might have survived the anæsthetic, and it was equally probable that subsequent care on the part of the doctor and the nurse might have kept him alive long enough to permit his case to be recorded by virtue of his having escaped alive from the operating table, as one of those exasperatingly smug things known to the profession as a " successful operation,"— sardonic prelude to an act of God!

There seems to be no such thing as an unsuccessful operation. If God would only keep his finger out of the business, nothing could go wrong. It is always the act of God that keeps a man from enjoying the fruits of an absolutely successful operation. Up to the instant that Braden's knife took its sanguinary course, there was every indication that the operation would be successful, even though Mr. Thorpe were to breathe his last while the necessary stitches were being taken.

He had slept soundly throughout the night just past. For the first night in a week his mind and body took the rest that had been denied them for so long. The thing was behind him. It was over. He had earned his right to sleep. When he laid his head upon the pillow there was no fear of evil dreams, no qualms, no troubled conscience to baffle the demands of exhaustion. He had done no wrong. His sleep was long, sweet, re-

reshing. He had no fear of God in his soul that night, or he had spoken with God in the silence of the long night before and he was at peace with Him. No man could say that he had not tried to save the life of Templeton Thorpe. He had worked with all the knowledge at his command; he himself felt that he had worked as one inspired,— so much so, in fact, that he now knew that never again in all his life would he be able to surpass or even equal the effort of that unforgetable day. But he had recognised the futility of skill even as it was being exerted to its utmost accomplishments. The inevitable was bared to his intelligence. He had done his best for Templeton Thorpe; no man could have done more than that. With the eyes of other men upon him, eyes that saw all that he saw, he took it upon himself to spare his grandfather the few days that might have been added to his hell by an act less kind,— though no doubt more eminently professional.

And as he performed that final act of mercy, his mind and heart were on the handshake, and the word of farewell that his benefactor had murmured in his ear. Templeton Thorpe was at rest; he had thanked his grandson in advance.

So it was that Braden slept the night through without a tremor. But with his waking came the sense of responsibility to others. Not to the world at large, not to the wife of the dead man, but to the three sincere and honourable members of his profession, who, no doubt, found themselves in a most trying position. They were, in a way, his judges, and as such they were compelled to accept their own testimony as evidence for or against him. With him it was a matter of principle, with them a question of ethics. As men they

were in all probability applauding his act, but as doctors they were bound by the first and paramount teachings of their profession to convict him of an unspeakable wrong. It was his duty to grant these men the right to speak of what they had seen.

He went first to see Dr. Bates, his oldest friend and counsellor, and the one man who could afterwards speak freely with the widow of the man who had been his lifelong patient. Going down in the elevator from his room at the hotel, Braden happened to glance at himself in the narrow mirror. He was startled into a second sharp, investigating look. Strange that he had not observed while shaving how thin his face had become. His cheeks seemed to have flattened out leanly over night; his heavy eyes looked out from shadowy recesses that he had failed to take account of before; there were deeper lines at the corners of his mouth, as if newly strengthened by some artful sculptor while he slept. He was older by years for that unguarded sleep. Time had taken him unawares; it had slyly seized the opportunity to remould his features while youth was weak from exhaustion. In a vague way he recalled a certain mysterious change in Anne Tresslyn's face. It was not age that had wrought the change in her, nor could it be age that had done the same for him.

The solution came to him suddenly, as he stepped out into the open air and saw the faces of other men. It was strength, not weakness, that had put its stamp upon his countenance, and upon Anne's; the strength that survives the constructive years, the years of development. He saw this set, firm strength in the faces of other men for the first time. They too no doubt had awakened abruptly from the dream of ambition to find themselves dominated by a purpose. That purpose was

in their faces. Ambition was back of that purpose perhaps, deep in the soul of the man, but purpose had become the necessity.

Every man comes to that strange spot in the dash through life where he stops to divest himself of an ideal. He lays it down beside the road and, without noticing, picks up a resolve in its place and strides onward, scarcely conscious of the substitution. It requires strength to carry a resolve. An ideal carries itself and is no burden. So each of these men in the street,— truckman, motorman, merchant, clerk, what you will,— sets forth each day with the same old resolution at his heels; and in their set faces is the strength that comes with the transition from wonder to earnestness. Its mark was stamped upon the countenances of young and old alike. Even the beggar at the street corner below was without his ideal. Even he had a definite, determined purpose.

Then there was that subtle change in Anne. He thought of it now, most unwillingly. He did not want to think of her. He was certain that he had put her out of his thoughts. Now he realised that she had merely lain dormant in his mind while it was filled with the intensities of the past few days. She had not been crowded out, after all. The sharp recollection of the impression he had had on seeing her immediately after his arrival was proof that she was still to be reckoned with in his thoughts.

The strange, elusive maturity that had come into her young, smooth face,— that was it. Maturity without the passing of Youth; definiteness, understanding, discovery,— a grip on the realities of life, just as it was with him and all the others who were awake. A

year in the life of a young thing like Anne could not have created the difference that he felt rather than saw.

Something more significant than the dimensions of a twelve-month had added its measure to Anne's outlook upon life. She had turned a corner in the lane and was facing the vast plain she would have to cross unguided. She had come to the place where she must think and act for herself,— and to that place all men and all women come abruptly, one time or another, to become units in the multitude.

We do not know when we pass that inevitable spot, nor have we the power to work backward and decide upon the exact moment when adolescence gave way to manhood. It comes and passes without our knowledge, and we are given a new vision in the twinkling of an eye, in a single beat of the heart. No man knows just when he becomes a man in his own reckoning. It is not a matter of years, nor growth, nor maturity of body and mind, but an awakening which goes unrecorded on the mind's scroll. Some men do not note the change until they are fifty, others when they are fifteen. Circumstance does the trick.

He was still thinking of Anne as he hurried up the front door-steps and rang Dr. Bates' bell. She was not the same Anne that he had known and loved, far back in the days when he was young. Could it be possible that it was only a year ago? Was Anne so close to the present as all that, and yet so indefinably remote when it came to analysing this new look in her eyes? Was it only a year ago that she was so young and so unfound?

A sudden sickness assailed him as he waited for the

maid to open the door. Anne had been made a widow. He, not God, was responsible for this new phase in her life. Had he not put a dreadful charge upon her conscience? Had he not forced her to share the responsibility with him? And, while the rest of the world might forever remain in ignorance, would it ever be possible for her to hide the truth from herself?

She knew what it all meant, and she had offered to share the consequences with him, no matter what course his judgment led him to pursue. He had not considered her until this instant as a partner in the undertaking, but now he realised that she must certainly be looking upon herself as such. His heart sank. He had made a hideous mistake. He should not have gone to her. She could not justify herself by the same means that were open to him.

From her point of view, he had killed her husband, and with her consent!

He found himself treating the dead man in a curiously detached fashion, and not as his own blood-relation. Her husband, that was the long and the short of his swift reflections, not his grandfather. All her life she would remember that she had supported him in an undertaking that had to do with the certain death of her husband, and no matter how merciful, how sensible that act may have been, or how earnestly he may have tried to see his way clear to follow a course opposed to the one he had taken, the fact remained that she had acknowledged herself prepared for just what subsequently happened in the operating room.

Going back to the beginning, Templeton Thorpe's death was in her mind the day she married him. It had never been a question with her as to how he should die, but *when*. But this way to the desired end could never

have been included in her calculations. *This* was not the way out.

She had been forced to take a stand with him in this unhappy business, and she would have to pay a cost that he could not share with her, for his conscience was clear. What were her thoughts to-day? With what ugly crime was she charging herself? Was she, in the secrecy of her soul, convicting herself of murder? Was *that* what he had given her to think about all the rest of her life?

The servant was slow in answering the bell. They always are at the homes of doctors.

"Is Dr. Bates at home?"

"Office hours from eight to nine, and four to six."

"Say that Dr. Thorpe wishes to see him."

This seemed to make a difference. "He is out, Dr. Thorpe. We expect him in any moment though. For lunch. Will you please to come in and wait?"

"Thank you."

She felt called upon to deliver a bit of information. "He went down to see Mrs. Thorpe, sir,— your poor grandmother."

"I see," said Braden dully. It did not occur to him that enlightenment was necessary. A queer little chill ran through his veins. Was Dr. Bates down there now, telling Anne all that he knew, and was she, in the misery of remorse, making him her confessor? In the light of these disturbing thoughts, he was fast becoming blind to the real object of this, the first of the three visits he was to make.

Dr. Bates found him staring gloomily from the window when he came into the office half an hour later, and at once put the wrong though obvious construction upon his mood.

"Come, come, my boy," he said as they shook hands; "put it out of your mind. Don't let the thing weigh like this. You knew what you were about yesterday, so don't look back upon what happened with —"

Braden interrupted him, irrelevantly. "You've been down to see Mrs. Thorpe. How is she? How does she appear to be taking it?" He spoke rapidly, nervously.

"As well as could be expected," replied the older man drily. "She is glad that it's all over. So are we all, for that matter."

"Did she send for you?"

"Yes," said Dr. Bates, after an instant's hesitation. "I'll be frank with you, Braden. She wanted to know just what happened."

"And you told her?"

"I told her that you did everything that a man could do," said the other, choosing his words with care.

"In other words, you did not tell her what happened."

"I did not, my boy. There is no reason why she should know. It is better that she should never know," said Dr. Bates gravely.

"What did she say?" asked Braden sharply.

Dr. Bates suddenly was struck by the pallor in the drawn face. "See here, Braden, you must get a little rest. Take my advice and —"

"Tell me what she had to say," insisted the young man.

"She cried a little when I told her that you had done your best, and that's about all."

"Didn't she confess that she expected — that she feared I might have —"

"Confess? Why do you use that word?" demanded Dr. Bates, as the young man failed to complete his sentence. His gaze was now fixed intently on Bra-

den's face. A suspicion was growing in his mind.

"I am terribly distressed about something, Dr. Bates," said Braden, uneasily. "I wish you would tell me everything that Anne had to say to you."

"Well, for one thing, she said that she knew you would do everything in your power to bring about a successful result. She seemed vastly relieved when I told her that you had done all that mortal man could do. I don't believe she has the faintest idea that — that an accident occurred. Now that I think of it, she did stop me when I undertook to convince her that your bark is worse than your bite, young man,— in other words, that your theories are for conversational and not practical purposes. Yes, she cut me off rather sharply. I hadn't attached any importance to her — See here, Braden," he demanded suddenly, "is there any reason why she should have cut me off like that? Had she cause to feel that you might have put into practice your — your — Come, come, you know what I mean." He was leaning forward in his chair, his hands gripping the arm-rests.

"She is more or less in sympathy with my views," said Braden warily. "Of course, you could not expect her to be in sympathy with them in this case, however." He put it out as a feeler.

"Well, I should say not!" exclaimed Dr. Bates. "It's conceivable that she may have been in some doubt, however, until I reassured her. By George, I am just beginning to see through her, Braden. She had me down there to — to set her mind at rest about — about *you*. 'Pon my soul, she did it neatly, too."

"And she believes — you think she believes that her mind is at rest?"

"That's an odd question. What do you mean?"

"Just that. Does she believe that you told her the truth?"

"Oh! I see. Well, a doctor has to tell a good many lies in the course of a year. He gets so that he can tell them with a straighter face than when he's telling the truth. I don't see why Mrs. Thorpe should doubt my word — my professional word — unless there is some very strong reason for doing so." He continued to eye Braden keenly. "Do you know of any reason?"

Thorpe by this time was able to collect himself. The primal instinct to unburden himself to this old, understanding friend, embraced sturdy, outspoken argument in defence of his act, but this defence did not contemplate the possible inclusion of Anne. He was now satisfied that she had not delivered herself into the confidence of Dr. Bates. She had kept her secret close. It was not for him to make revelations. The newly aroused fear that even this good old friend might attach an unholy design to their motives impelled him to resort to equivocation, if not to actual falsehood. This was a side to the matter that had not been considered by him till now. But he was now acutely aware of an ugly conviction that she had thought of it afterwards, just as he was thinking of it now, hence her failure to repeat to Dr. Bates the substance of their discussion before the operation took place.

He experienced an unaccountable, disquieting sensation of guilt, of complicity in an evil deed, of a certain slyness that urged him to hide something from this shrewd old man. To his utter amazement, he was saying to himself that he must not "squeal" on Anne, his partner! He now knew that he could never speak of what had passed between himself and Anne. Of his own part in the affair he could speak frankly with this

man, and with all men, and be assured that no sinister motive would be attributed to him. He would be free from the slightest trace of suspicion so long as he stood alone in accounts of the happenings of the day before. No matter how violent the criticism or how bitter the excoriation, he would at least be credited with honest intentions. But the mere mention of Anne's name would be the signal for a cry from the housetops, and all the world would hear. And Anne's name would sound the death knell of "honest intentions."

"As I said a moment ago, Dr. Bates, Mrs. Thorpe is fully aware of my rather revolutionary views," he said, not answering the question with directness. "That was enough to cause some uneasiness on my part."

"Um! I dare say," said Dr. Bates thoughtfully. Back in his mind was the recollection of a broken engagement, or something of the sort. "I see. Naturally. I think, on the whole, my boy, she believes that I told her the truth. You needn't be uneasy on that score. I — I — for a moment I had an idea that you might have *said* something to her." It was almost a question.

Braden shook his head. His eyes did not flicker as he answered steadily: "Surely you cannot think that I would have so much as mentioned my views in discussing —"

"Certainly not, my boy," cried the other heartily. Braden did not fail to note the look of relief in his eye, however. "So now you are all right as far as Mrs. Thorpe is concerned. I made a point of assuring her that everything went off satisfactorily to the three of us. She need never know the truth. You needn't feel that you cannot look her in the eyes, Braden."

"'Gad, that sounds sinister," exclaimed Thorpe, staring. "That's what they say when they are talking about thieves and liars, Dr. Bates."

"I beg your pardon. I meant well, my boy, although perhaps it wasn't the nice thing to say. And now have you come to tell me that it was an accident, an unfortunate —"

"No," said Braden, straightening up. "I come to you first, Dr. Bates, because you are my oldest friend and supporter, and because you were the lifelong friend of my grandfather. I am going also to Dr. Bray and Dr. Ernest after I leave here. I do not want any one of you to feel that I expect you to shield me in this matter. You are at liberty to tell all that you know. I did what I thought was best, what my conscience ordered me to do, and I did it openly in the presence of three witnesses. There was no accident. No one may say that I bungled. No one —"

"I should say you didn't bungle," said the older man. "I never witnessed a finer — ahem! In fact, we all agree on that. My boy, you have a great future before you. You are one of the most skilful —"

"Thanks. I didn't come to hear words of praise, Dr. Bates. I came to release you from any obligation that you may —"

"Tut, tut! That's all right. We understand — perfectly. All three of us. I have talked it over with Bray and Ernest. What happened up there yesterday is as a closed book. We shall never open it. I will not go so far as to say that we support your theories, but we do applaud your method. There isn't one of us who would not have *felt* like doing the thing you did, but on the other hand there isn't one of us who could have done it. We would have allowed him a few

more days of life. Now that it is all over, I will not say that you did wrong. I can only say that it was not right to do the thing you did. However, it is your conscience and not mine that carries the load,— if there is one. You may rest assured that not one of us will ever voluntarily describe what actually took place."

"But I do not want to feel that you regard it your duty to protect me from the consequences of a deliberate —"

"See here, my lad, do you want the world to know that you took your grandfather's life? That's what it amounts to, you know. You can't go behind the facts."

Thorpe lowered his head. "It would be ridiculous for me to say that I do not care whether the world knows the truth about it, Dr. Bates. To be quite honest, sir, I do not want the world to know. You will understand why, in this particular instance, I should dread publicity. Mr. Thorpe was my grandfather. He was my benefactor. But that isn't the point. I had no legal right to do the thing I did. I took it upon myself to take a step that is not now countenanced by the law or by our profession. I did this in the presence of witnesses. What I want to make clear to you and to the other doctors is that I should have acted differently if my patient had been any one else in the world. I loved my grandfather. He was my only friend. He expected me to do him a great service yesterday. I could not fail him, sir. When I saw that there was nothing before him but a few awful days of agony, I did what he would have blessed me for doing had he been conscious. If my patient had been any one else I should have adhered strictly to the teachings of my profession. I would not have broken the law."

"Your grandfather knew when he went up to the

operating room that he was not to leave it alive. Is that the case?"

"He did not expect to leave it alive, sir," amended Braden steadily.

"You had talked it all over with him?"

"I had agreed to perform the operation, that is all, sir. He knew that his case was hopeless. That is why he insisted on having the operation performed."

"In other words, he deliberately put you in your present position? He set his mind on forcing this thing upon you? Then all I have to say for Templeton Thorpe is that he was a damned — But there, he's dead and gone and, thank God, he can't hear me. You must understand, Braden, that this statement of yours throws an entirely new light upon the case," said Dr. Bates gravely. "The fact that it was actually expected of you makes your act a — er — shall we say less inspirational? I do not believe it wise for you to make this statement to my colleagues. You are quite safe in telling me, for I understand the situation perfectly. But if you tell them that there was an agreement — even a provisional agreement — I — well, the thing will not look the same to them."

"You are right, Dr. Bates," said Braden, after a moment. "Thank you for the advice. I see what you mean. I shall not tell them all that I have told you. Still, I am determined to see them and —"

"Quite so. It is right that you should. Give them cause to respect you, my boy. They saw everything. They are sound, just men. From what they have said to me, you may rest assured that they do not condemn you any more than I do. The anæsthetician saw nothing. He was occupied. That young fellow — what's his name? — may have been more capable of observing

than we'd suspect in one so tender, but I fancy he wouldn't know *everything*. I happen to know that he saw the knife slip. He mentioned it to Simeon Dodge."

"To Simmy Dodge!"

"Yes. Dodge came to see me last night. He told me that the boy made some queer statement to him about the pylorus, and he seemed to be troubled. I set him straight in the matter. He doesn't know any more about the pylorus than he knew before, but he does know that no surgeon on earth could have avoided the accident that befell you in the crisis. Simmy, good soul, was for going out at once and buying off the interne, but I stopped him. We will take care of the young man. He doesn't say it was intentional, and we will convince him that it wasn't. How do you stand with young George Tresslyn?"

"I don't know. He used to like me. I haven't seen —"

"It appears that Simmy first inquired of George if he knew anything about the pylorus. He is Mrs. Thorpe's brother. I should be sorry if he got it into his head that — well, that there was anything wrong, anything that might take him to her with ugly questions."

"I shall have to chance that, Dr. Bates," said Braden grimly.

"Mrs. Thorpe must never know, Braden," said the other, gripping his hands behind his back.

"If it gets out, she can't help knowing. She may suspect even now —"

"But it is not to get out. There may be rumours starting from this interne's remark and supported by your avowed doctrines, but we must combine to suppress *them*. The newspapers cannot print a line without our

authority, and they'll never get it. They will not dare to print a rumour that cannot be substantiated. I spoke of George a moment ago for a very good reason. I am afraid of him. He has been going down hill pretty fast of late. It wouldn't surprise me to hear that he had sunk low enough to attempt blackmail."

"Good heaven! Why — why, he's not that sort —"

"Don't be too sure of him. He is almost in the gutter, they say. He's *that* sort, at any rate."

"I don't believe George ever did a crooked thing in his life, poor devil. He wouldn't dream of coming to me with a demand for —"

"He wouldn't come to you," said the other, sententiously. "He would not have the courage to do that. But he might go to Anne. Do you see what I mean?"

Braden shook his head. He recalled George's experiences in the sick-room and the opportunity that had been laid before him. "I see what you mean, but George — well, he's not as bad as you think, Dr. Bates."

"We'll see," said the older man briefly. "I hope he's the man you seem to think he is. I am afraid of him."

"He loves his sister, Dr. Bates."

"In that case he may not attempt to blackmail her, but it would not prevent his going to her with his story. The fact that he does love her may prove to be your greatest misfortune."

"What do you mean?"

"As I said before, Anne must never know," said Dr. Bates, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder and gripping it suddenly. "Your grandfather talked quite freely with me toward the end. No; Anne must never know."

Braden stared at the floor in utter perplexity.

CHAPTER XVII

WADE went through the unnecessary form of "giving notice" a day or two after his old master was laid to rest. On the day that Templeton Thorpe went to the hospital he abandoned an almost lifelong habit of cocking his head in an attitude of listening, and went about the house with the corners of his mouth drooping instead of maintaining their everlasting twist upward in the set smile of humility.

He had been there for thirty years and more, and now he was no longer needed. He would have to get out. He had saved a little money,— not much, but enough to start a small business of some sort,— and he was complaining bitterly to himself of the fate that deprived him of Mr. Thorpe's advice just when it was imperative that he should know what enterprise would be the safest for him to undertake. It nettled him to think that he had failed to take advantage of his opportunities while this shrewd, capable old man was alive and in a position to set him on the right path to prosperity. He should have had the sense to look forward to this very day.

For thirty years he had gone on believing that he knew so much more than Mr. Thorpe that Mr. Thorpe couldn't possibly get along without him, and now he was brought up sharply against the discovery that he couldn't get along without Mr. Thorpe. For thirty years he had done only the things that Mr. Thorpe wanted him to do, instructed him to do, or even drove him to do. Suddenly he found himself with absolutely

nothing to do, or at any rate with no one to tell him what to do, and instead of a free and independent agent, with no one to order him about, he wasn't anything, — he wasn't anything at all. This was not what he had been looking forward to with such complacency and confidence. He was like a lost soul. No one to tell him what to do! No one to valet! No one to call him a blundering idiot! No one to despise except himself! And he had waited thirty years for the day to come when he could be his own man, with the power to tell every one to go to the devil — and to do so himself if he saw fit. He hardly recognised himself when he looked in the mirror. Was that scared, bleak, wobegone face a reflection? Was he really like that?

He was filled with a bitter rage against Mr. Thorpe. How he hated him for dying like this and leaving him with nothing to do after all these years of faithful service. And how shocked he was, and frightened, to discover himself wanting to pause outside his master's door with his head cocked to hear the voice that would never shout out to him again.

He knew to a penny just how much he had in the Savings Banks about town,— a trifle over twelve thousand dollars, the hoardings of thirty years. He had gone on being a valet all these years without a single thought of being anything else, and yet he had always looked forward to the day when he could go into some nice, genteel little business for himself,— when he could step out of service and enjoy life to the full. But how was he to go about stepping out of service and into a nice, genteel little business without Mr. Thorpe to tell him what to do? Here was he, sixty-five years old, without a purpose in life. Beginning life at sixty-five!

Of course, young Mrs. Thorpe would have no use

for a valet. No doubt she would marry again,— Wade had his notions! — but he couldn't think of subjecting himself to the incompetency of a new master, even though his old place were held open for him. He would not be able to adjust himself to another master,— or to put it in his own words, it would be impossible to adjust another master to himself. Young Master Braden might give him something to do for the sake of old times, but then again Mrs. Thorpe would have to be taken into consideration. Wade hadn't the slightest doubt that she would one day "marry into the family again." As a matter of fact, he believed in his soul that there was an understanding between the young people. There were moments when he squinted his eyes and cringed a little. He would have given a great deal to be able to put certain thoughts out of his mind.

And then there was another reason for not wanting to enter the service of Dr. Braden Thorpe. Suppose he were to become critically ill. Would he, in that event, feel at liberty to call in an outside doctor to take charge of his case? Would it not be natural for Dr. Braden to attend him? And suppose that Dr. Braden were to conclude that he couldn't get well!

He gave notice to Murray, the butler. He hated to do this, for he despised Murray. The butler would not have to go. He too had been with Mr. Thorpe for more than a quarter of a century, and death had not robbed him of a situation. What manner of justice was it that permitted Murray to go on being useful while he had to go out into the world and become a burden to himself?

"Murray informs me, Wade, that you have given notice," said Anne, looking up as he shuffled into an attitude before her. "He says that you have saved quite

a lot of money and are therefore independent. I am happy to hear that you are in a position to spend the remainder of your life in ease and — why, what is the matter, Wade?"

He was very pale, and swayed slightly. "If you please, madam, Murray is mistaken," he mumbled. An idea was forming in his unhappy brain. "I — I am leaving because I realise that you no longer have any use for my services, and not because I am — er — well off, as the saying is. I shall try to get another place." His mind was clear now. The idea was completely formed. "Of course, it will be no easy matter to find a place at my age, but,— well, a man must live, you know." He straightened up a bit, as if a weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

She was puzzled. "But you have money, Wade. You have worked hard. You have earned a good rest. Why should you go on slaving for other people?"

"Alas," said Wade, resuming the patient smile that had been missing for days and cocking his head a little, "it is not for me to rest. Murray does not know everything. My savings are small. He does not know the uses to which I have been obliged to — I beg pardon, madam, you cannot, of course, be interested in my poor affairs." He was very humble.

"But Mr. Thorpe always spoke of you as an exceedingly thrifty man. I am sure that he believed you to be comfortably fixed for life, Wade."

"Quite so," agreed Wade. "And I should have been had it been possible to lay by with all these unmentioned obligations crowding upon me, year in, year out."

"Your family? I did not know that there was any one dependent upon you."

"I have never spoken of my affairs, ma'am," said

Wade. "It is not for a servant to trouble his employer with — ahem! You understand, I am sure."

"Perfectly. I am sorry."

"So I thought I would give notice at once, madam, so that I might be on the lookout as soon as possible for a new place. You see, I shall soon be too old to apply for a place, whilst if I manage to secure one in time I may be allowed to stay on in spite of my age."

"Have you anything in view?"

"Nothing, madam. I am quite at a loss where to —"

"Take all the time you like, Wade," she said, genuinely sorry for the man. She never had liked him. He was the one man in all the world who might have pitied her for the mistake she had made, and he had steeled his heart against her. She knew that he felt nothing but scorn for her, and yet she was sorry for him. This was new proof to her that she had misjudged her own heart. It was a softer thing than she had supposed. "Stay on here until you find something satisfactory. Mr. Thorpe would have wished you to stay. You were a very faithful friend to him, Wade. He set great store by you."

"Thank you, madam. You are very kind. Of course, I shall strive to make myself useful while I remain. I dare say Murray can find something for me to do. Temporarily, at least, I might undertake the duties of the furnace man and handy-man about the house. He is leaving to-morrow, I hear. If you will be so good as to tell Murray that I am to take O'Toole's place,— temporarily, of course,— I shall be very grateful. It will give me time to collect my thoughts, ma'am."

"It will not be necessary, Wade, for you to take on O'Toole's work. I am not asking you to perform

hard, manual labor. You must not feel that my —"

"Pardon me, madam," interrupted he; "I very much prefer to do some sort of regular work, if I may be permitted."

She smiled. "You will find Murray a hard task-master, I am afraid."

He took a long breath, as of relief — or could it have been pleasure? "I quite understand that, madam. He is a martinet. Still, I shall not mind." The same thought was in the mind of each: he was accustomed to serving a hard task-master. "If you don't mind, I shall take O'Toole's place until you find some one else. To-morrow I shall move my belongings from the room upstairs to O'Toole's room off the furnace-room. Thank —"

"No!" she exclaimed. "You are not to do that. Keep your old room, Wade. I — I cannot allow you to go down there. Mr. Thorpe would never forgive me if he knew that —" He lifted his eyes at the sudden pause and saw that she was very white. Was she too afraid of ghosts?

"It's very good of you," he said after a moment. "I shall do as you wish in everything, and I shall let you know the instant I find another place." He cleared his throat. "I fear, madam, that in the confusion of the past few days I have failed to express to you my sympathy. I assure you the oversight was not —"

She was looking straight into his eyes. "Thank you, Wade," she interrupted coldly. "Your own grief would be sufficient excuse, if any were necessary. If you will send Murray to me I will tell him that you have withdrawn your notice and will stay on in O'Toole's place. It will not be necessary for him to engage another furnace-man at present."

"No, ma'am," said Wade, and then added without a trace of irony in his voice: "At any rate not until cold weather sets in."

And so it was that this man solved the greatest problem that had ever confronted him. He went down into the cellars to take orders from the man he hated, from the man who would snarl at him and curse him and humiliate him to the bitter end, and all because he knew that he could not begin life over again. He wanted to be ordered about, he wanted to be snarled at by an overbearing task-master. It simplified everything. He would never be called upon to think for himself. Thorpe or Murray, what mattered which of them was in command? It was all the same to him. His dignity passed away with the passing of his career as a "Man," and he rejoiced in the belief that he had successfully evaded the responsibilities that threatened him up to the moment he entered the presence of the mistress of the house. He was no longer without a purpose in life. He would not have to go out and be independent.

Toward the end of the second week Templeton Thorpe's will was read by Judge Hollenback in the presence of "the family." There had been some delay on account of Braden Thorpe's absence from the city. No one knew where he had gone, nor was he ever to explain his sudden departure immediately after the funeral. He simply disappeared from his hotel, without so much as a bag or a change of linen in his possession, so far as one could know. At the end of ten days he returned as suddenly and as casually as he had gone away, but very much improved in appearance. The strange pallor had left his cheeks and his eyes had lost the heavy, tired expression.

At first he flatly refused to go down for the reading

of the will. He was not a beneficiary under the new instrument and he could see no reason for his attendance. Anne alone understood. The old vow not to enter the house while she was its mistress,— that was the reason. He was now in a position to revive that vow and to order his actions accordingly.

She drooped a little at the thought of it. From time to time she caught herself wishing that she could devise some means of punishing him, only to berate herself afterward for the selfishness that inspired the thought.

Still, why shouldn't he come there now? She was the same now that she was before her marriage took place,— a year older, that was all, but no less desirable. That was the one thing she could not understand in him. She could understand his disgust, his scorn, his rage, but she could not see how it was possible for him to hold out against the qualities that had made him love her so deeply before she gave him cause to hate her.

As for the operation that had resulted in the death of her husband, Anne had but one way of looking at it. Braden had been forced to operate against his will, against his best judgment. He was to be pitied. His grandfather had failed in his attempt to corrupt the souls of others in his desire for peace, and there remained but the one cowardly alternative: the appeal to this man who loved him. In his extremity, he had put upon Braden the task of performing a miracle, knowing full well that its accomplishment was impossible, that failure was as inevitable as death itself.

The thought never entered her mind that in persuading Braden to perform this strange act of mercy her husband may have been moved by the sole desire to put the final touch to the barrier he had wrought between them. The fact that Braden was responsible for his

death had no sinister meaning for her. It was the same as if he had operated upon a total stranger with a like result and with perhaps identical motives.

She kept on saying to herself that she had given up hope of ever regaining the love she had lost. She tried to remember just when she had ceased to hope. Was it before or after that last conversation took place in the library? Hope may have died, but he was alive and she was alive. Then how could love be dead?

It was Simmy Dodge who prevailed upon Braden to be present at the reading of the will. Simmy was the sort of man who goes about, in the goodness of his heart, adjusting matters for other people. He constituted himself in this instance, however, as the legal adviser of his old friend and companion, and that gave him a certain amount of authority.

"And what's more," he said in arguing with the obdurate Braden, "we'll probably have to smash the will, if, as you say, you have been cut off without a nickel. You —"

"But I don't want to smash it," protested Braden.

"And why not?" demanded Simmy, in surprise. "You are his only blood relation, aren't you? Why the deuce should he leave everything away from you? Of course we'll make a fight for it. I've never heard of a more outrageous piece of —"

"You don't understand, Simmy," Braden interrupted, suddenly realising that his position would be a difficult one to explain, even to this good and loyal friend. "We'll drop the matter for the present, at any rate."

"But why should Mr. Thorpe have done this rotten, inconceivable thing to you, Brady?" demanded Dodge. "Good Lord, that will won't stand a minute in a court of —"

"It will stand so far as I'm concerned," said Braden sharply, and Simmy blinked his eyes in bewilderment.

"You wouldn't be fighting Anne, you know," he ventured after a moment, assuming that Braden's attitude was due to reluctance in that direction. "She is provided for outside the will, she tells me."

"Are you her attorney, Simmy?"

"Yes. That is, the firm represents her, and I'm one of the firm."

"I don't see how you can represent both of us, old chap."

"That's just what I'm trying to get into your head. I couldn't represent you if there was to be a fight with Anne. But we can fight these idiotic charities, can't we?"

"No," said Braden flatly. "My grandfather's will is to stand just as it is, Simmy. I shall not contest for a cent. And so, if you please, there's no reason for my going down there to listen to the reading of the thing. I know pretty well what the document says. I was in Mr. Thorpe's confidence. For your own edification, Simmy, I'll merely say that I have already had my share of the estate, and I'm satisfied."

"Still, in common decency, you ought to go down and listen to the reading of the will. Judge Hollenback says he will put the thing off until you are present, so you might as well go first as last. Be reasonable, Brady. I know how you feel toward Anne. I can appreciate your unwillingness to go to her house after what happened a year ago. Judge Hollenback declares that his letter of instruction from Mr. Thorpe makes it obligatory for him to read the document in the presence of his widow and his grandson, and in the library of his

late home. Otherwise, the thing could have been done in Hollenback's offices."

In the end Braden agreed to be present.

When Judge Hollenback smoothed out the far from voluminous looking document, readjusted his nose glasses and cleared his throat preparatory to reading, the following persons were seated in the big, fire-lit library: Anne Thorpe, the widow; Braden Thorpe, the grandson; Mrs. Tresslyn, George Tresslyn, Simmy Dodge, Murray, and Wade, the furnace-man. The two Tresslyns were there by Anne's request. Late in the day she was overcome by the thought of sitting there alone while Braden was being dispossessed of all that rightfully belonged to him. She had not intended to ask her mother to come down for the reading. Somehow she had felt that Mrs. Tresslyn's presence would indicate the consummation of a project that had something ignoble about it. She knew that her mother could experience no other sensation than that of curiosity in listening to the will. Her interest in the affairs of Templeton Thorpe ended with the signing of the ante-nuptial contract, supplemented of course by the event which satisfactorily terminated the agreement inside of a twelve-month. But Anne, practically alone in the world as she now found herself to be, was suddenly aware of a great sense of depression. She wanted her mother. She wanted some one near who would not look at her with scornful, bitter eyes.

George's presence is to be quickly explained. He had spent the better part of the week with Anne, sleeping in the house at her behest. For a week she had braved it out alone. Then came the sudden surrender to dread, terror, loneliness. The shadows in the halls

were grim; the sounds in the night were sinister, the stillness that followed them creepy; the servants were things that stalked her, and she was afraid — mortally afraid in this home that was not hers. She had made up her mind to go away for a long time just as soon as everything was settled.

As for the furnace-man, Judge Hollenback had summoned him on his arrival at the house. So readily had Wade adapted himself to his new duties that he now felt extremely uncomfortable and ill-at-ease in a room that had been like home to him for thirty years. He seemed to feel that this was no place for the furnace-man, notwithstanding the scouring and polishing process that temporarily had restored him to a more exalted office, — for once more he was the smug, impeccable valet.

Braden was the last to arrive. He timed his arrival so that there could be no possibility of an informal encounter with Anne. She came forward and shook hands with him, simply, unaffectedly.

"You have been away," she said, looking straight into his eyes. He was conscious of a feeling of relief. He had been living in some dread of what he might detect in her eyes. But it was a serene, frank expression that he found in them, not a question.

"Yes," he said. "I was tired," he added after a moment.

She hesitated. Then: "I have not seen you, Braden, since — since the twenty-first. You have not given me the opportunity to tell you that I know you did all that any one could possibly do for Mr. Thorpe. Thank you for undertaking the impossible. I am sorry — oh, so sorry,— that you were made to suffer. I want you to remember too that it was with my sanction that you made the hopeless effort."

He turned cold. The others had heard every word. She had spoken without reserve, without the slightest indication of nervousness or compunction. The very thing that he feared had come to pass. She had put herself definitely on record. He glanced quickly about, searching the faces of the other occupants of the room. His gaze fell upon Wade, and rested for a second or two. Something told him that Wade's gaze would shift,— and it did.

"I did everything, Anne. Thank you for believing in me." That was all. No word of sympathy, no mawkish mumbling of regret, no allusion to his own loss. He looked again into her eyes, this time in quest of the motive that urged her to make this unnecessary declaration. Was there a deeper significance to be attached to her readiness to assume responsibility? He looked for the light in her eye that would convince him that she was taking this stand because of the love she felt for him. He was immeasurably relieved to find no secret message there. She had not stooped to that, and he was gratified. Her eyes were clouded with concern for him, that was all. He was ashamed of himself for the thought,— and afterwards he wondered why he should have been ashamed. After all, it was only right that she should be sorry for him. He deserved that much from her.

An awkward silence ensued. Simmy Dodge coughed nervously, and then Braden advanced to greet Mrs. Tresslyn. She did not rise. Her gloved hand was extended and he took it without hesitation.

"It is good to see you again, Braden," she said, with the bland, perfunctory parting of the lips that stands for a smile with women of her class. He meant nothing to her now.

"Thanks," he said, and moved on to George, who regarded him with some intensity for a moment and then gripped his hand heartily. "How are you, George?"

"Fine! First stage of regeneration, you know. I'm glad to see you, Brady."

There was such warmth in the repressed tones that Thorpe's hand clasp tightened. Tresslyn was still a friend. His interest quickened into a keen examination of the young man who had pronounced himself in the first stage of regeneration, whatever that may have signified to one of George's type. He was startled by the haggard, sick look in the young fellow's face. George must have read the other's expression, for he said: "I'm all right,— just a little run down. That's natural, I suppose."

"He has a dreadful cold," said Anne, who had overheard. "I can't get him to do anything for it."

"Don't you worry about me, Anne," said George stoutly.

"Just the same, you should take care of yourself," said Braden. "Pneumonia gets after you big fellows, you know. How are you, Wade? Poor old Wade, you must miss my grandfather terribly. You knew him before I was born. It seems an age, now that I think of it in that way."

"Thirty-three years, sir," said Wade. "Nearly ten years longer than Murray, Mr. Braden. It does seem an age."

The will was not a lengthy document. The reading took no more than three minutes, and for another full minute after its conclusion, not a person in the room uttered a word. A sort of stupefaction held them all in its grip,— that is, all except the old lawyer who was

putting away his glasses and waiting for the outburst that was sure to follow.

In the first place, Mr. Thorpe remembered Anne. After declaring that she had been satisfactorily provided for in a previous document, known to her as a contract, he bequeathed to her the house in which she had lived for a single year with him. All of its contents went with this bequest. To Josiah Wade he left the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars, to Edward Murray ten thousand dollars, and to each of the remaining servants in his household a sum equal to half of their earnings while in his service. There were bequests to his lawyer, his doctor and his secretary, besides substantial gifts to persons who could not by any chance have expected anything from this grim old man,— such as the friendly doorman at his favourite club, and the man who had been delivering newspapers to him for a score of years or more, and the old negro bootblack who had attended him at the Brevoort in the days before the Italian monopoly set in, and the two working-girls who supported the invalid widow of a man who had gone to prison and died there after having robbed the Thorpe estate of a great many thousands of dollars while acting as a confidential and trusted agent.

Then came the astounding disposition of the fortune that had accumulated in the time of Templeton Thorpe. There were no bequests outright to charity, contrary to all expectations. The listeners were prepared to hear of huge gifts to certain institutions and societies known to have been favoured by the testator. Various hospitals were looked upon as sure to receive splendid endowments, and specific colleges devoted to the advancement of medical and surgical science were also regarded as inevitable beneficiaries. It was all cut and dried, so

far as Judge Hollenback's auditors were concerned,—that is to say, prior to the reading of the will. True, the old lawyer had declared in the beginning, that the present will was drawn and signed on the afternoon of the day before the death of Mr. Thorpe, and that a previous instrument to which a codicil had been affixed was destroyed in the presence of two witnesses. The instrument witnessed by Wade and Murray was the one that had been destroyed. This should have aroused uneasiness in the mind of Braden Thorpe, if no one else, but he was slow to recognise the significance of the change in his grandfather's designs.

With his customary terseness, Templeton Thorpe declared himself to be hopelessly ill but of sound mind at the moment of drawing his last will and testament, and suffering beyond all human endurance. His condition at that moment, and for weeks beforehand, was such that death offered the only panacea. He had come to appreciate the curse of a life prolonged beyond reason. Therefore, in full possession of all his faculties and being now irrevocably converted to the principles of mercy advocated by his beloved grandson, Braden Lanier Thorpe, he placed the residue of his estate in trust, naming the aforesaid Braden Lanier Thorpe as sole trustee, without bond, the entire amount to be utilised and expended by him in the promotion of his noble and humane propaganda in relation to the fate of the hopelessly afflicted among those creatures fashioned after the image of God. The trust was to expire with the death of the said Braden Lanier Thorpe, when all funds remaining unused for the purposes herein set forth were to go without restriction to the heirs of the said trustee, either by bequest or administration.

In so many words, the testator vested in his grandson

full power and authority to use these funds, amounting to nearly six million dollars, as he saw fit in the effort to obtain for the human sufferer the same mercy that is extended to the beast of the field, and to make final disposition of the estate in his own will. Realising the present hopelessness of an attempt to secure legislation of this character, he suggested that first of all it would be imperative to prepare the way to such an end by creating in the minds of all the peoples of the world a state of common sense that could successfully combat and overcome love, sentimentality and cowardice! For these three, he pointed out, were the common enemy of reason. "And in compensation for the discharge of such duties as may come under the requirements of this trusteeship, the aforesaid Braden Lanier Thorpe shall receive the fees ordinarily allotted by law and, in addition, the salary of twenty-five thousand dollars per annum, until the terms of this instrument are fully carried out."

Anne Tresslyn Thorpe was named as executrix of the will.

CHAPTER XVIII

SIMMY DODGE was the first to speak. He was the first to grasp the full meaning of this deliberately ambiguous will. His face cleared.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, without respect for the proprieties. He slapped Braden on the back, somewhat enthusiastically. "We sha'n't have to smash it, after all. It's the cleverest thing I've ever listened to, old man. What a head your grandfather had on his —"

Braden leaped to his feet, his face quivering. "Of course we'll smash it," he stormed. "Do you suppose or imagine for an instant that I will allow such a thing as that to stand? Do you —"

"Go slow, Brady, go slow," broke in his excited, self-appointed lawyer. "Can't you see through it? Can't you see what he was after? Why, good Lord, man, he has made you the principal legatee,— he has actually given you *everything*. All this rigmarole about a trust or a foundation or whatever you want to call it amounts to absolutely nothing. The money is yours to do what you like with as long as you live. You have complete control of every dollar of it. No one else has a thing to say about it. Why, it's the slickest, soundest will I've —"

"Oh, my God!" groaned Braden, dropping into a chair and covering his face with his hands.

Judge Hollenback was smiling benignly. He had drawn the will. He knew that it was sound, if not "slick," as Simmy had described it. The three Tress-

lyns leaned forward in their chairs, bewildered, dumbfounded. Their gaze was fixed on the shaking figure of Braden Thorpe.

As for Wade, he had sunk helplessly into a chair. A strange, hunted look appeared in his eyes. His chin sank lower and lower, and his body twitched. He was not caring what happened to Braden Thorpe, he was not even thinking about the vast fortune that had been placed at the young man's disposal. His soul was sick. In spite of all that he could do to prevent it, his gaze went furtively to Murray's rubicund jowl, and then shifted to the rapt, eager face of his young mistress. Twenty-five thousand dollars! There was no excuse for him now. With all that money he could not hope to stay on in service. He was rich. He would have to go out into the world and shift for himself. He could not go on 'tending furnace for Mrs. Thorpe,— he couldn't take the bread out of some deserving wretch's mouth by hanging onto the job with all that money in his possession. Mrs. Thorpe would congratulate him on the morrow, and turn him out. And no one would tell him where to go,— unless it might be Murray, in a fit of anger.

"Mr. Thorpe was not moved by any desire to circumvent certain — perhaps I should say that he intended you, Dr. Thorpe, to act in strict accordance with the provisions of the will," said Judge Hollenback. "He did not lose sight of the fact that he had promised to leave you out of his will completely. This money is not yours. It is in your hands as trustee. Mr. Dodge is wrong. Your grandfather was very deeply in earnest when he authorised the drawing of this instrument. You will discover, on reading it carefully and thoughtfully, that he does not give you the right to divert any of this money to your own private uses, but clearly says

that it is to be employed, under your sole direction and as you see fit, for the carrying out of your ideas along certain lines. He has left a letter for you, Dr. Thorpe, which I have been privileged to read. You will find it in this envelope. For the benefit of future beneficiaries under this instrument, I may say that he expresses the hope and desire that you will not permit the movement to languish after your death. In fact, he expressly instructs you to establish during your life time a systematic scheme of education by reason of which the world eventually may become converted to the ideas which you promulgate and defend. He realised that this cannot be brought about in one generation, nor in two, three or four. Indeed, he ventures the opinion that two centuries may pass before this sound and sensible theory of yours,— the words are his, not mine,—becomes a reality. Two centuries, mind you. So, you will see, he does not expect you to perform a miracle, Braden. You are to start the ball rolling, so to speak, in a definite, well-supported groove, from which there can be no deviation. By this will, you are to have free and unhampered use of a vast sum of money. He does not bind you in any particular. So much for the outward expression of the will. Inversely, however, as you will find by reading this letter, you are not so completely free to exercise your own discretion. You will find that while he gives to you the undisputed right to bequeath this fortune as you may see fit at the expiration of your term as trustee — in short, at your death,— he suggests that,—being an honourable and conscientious man to his certain knowledge,— you will create a so-called foundation for the perpetuation of your ideas — and his, I may add. This foundation is to grow out of and to be the real development of the trust over which you now have absolute control. But all *this, my* friend, we may discuss later on.

The real significance of Mr. Thorpe's will is to be found in the faith he reposes in you. He puts you on your honour. He entrusts this no inconsiderable fortune to your care. It rests entirely with you as to the manner in which it shall be used. If you elect to squander it, there is no one to say nay to you. It is expressly stated here that the trust comprehends the spread of the doctrines you advocate, but it does not pretend to guide or direct you in the handling of the funds. Mr. Thorpe trusts you to be governed by the dictates of your own honour. I have no hesitancy in saying that I protested against this extraordinary way of creating a trust, declaring to him that I thought he was doing wrong in placing you in such a position,— that is to say, it was wrong of him to put temptation in your way. He was confident, however. In fact, he was entirely satisfied with the arrangement. I will admit that at the time I had a queer impression that he was chuckling to himself, but of course I was wrong. It was merely the quick and difficult breathing of one in dire pain. The situation is quite plain, ladies and gentlemen. The will is sound. Mr. Dodge has observed,— somewhat hastily I submit,— that he believes it will not have to be smashed. He says that the money has been left to Dr. Thorpe, and that the trust is a rigmarole, or something of the sort. Mr. Dodge is right, after a fashion. If Dr. Thorpe chooses to violate his grandfather's staunch belief in his integrity, if he elects to disregard the suggestions set down in this letter — which, you must understand, is in no sense a legal supplement to the will,— he may justify Mr. Dodge's contention that the fortune is his to do with as he pleases." He turned to Anne. "I beg to inform you, Mrs. Thorpe, that your duties as executrix will not prove onerous. Your late husband *left his* affairs in such shape that there will be absolutely

no difficulty in settling the estate. It could be done in half an hour, if necessary. Everything is ship-shape, as the saying is. I shall be glad to place myself at the command of yourself and your attorneys. Have no hesitancy in calling upon me."

He waited. No one spoke. Braden was looking at him now. He had recovered from his momentary collapse and was now listening intently to the old lawyer's words. There was a hard, uncompromising light in his eyes,— a sullen prophecy of trouble ahead. After a moment, Judge Hollenback construed their silence as an invitation to go on. He liked to talk.

"Our good friend Dodge says that no one else has a thing to say about the manner in which the trustee of this vast fund shall disperse his dollars." (Here he paused, for it sounded rather good to him.) "Ahem! Now does Mr. Dodge really believe what he says? Just a moment, please. I am merely formulating — er — I beg pardon, Mrs. Thorpe. You were saying —?"

"I prefer not to act as executrix of the will, Judge Hollenback," said Anne dully. "How am I to go about being released from —"

"My dear Mrs. Thorpe, you must believe me when I say that your duties,— er — the requirements,— are practically *nil*. Pray do not labour under the impression that —"

"It isn't that," said Anne. "I just don't want to serve, that's all. I shall refuse."

"My daughter will think the matter over for a few days, Judge Hollenback," said Mrs. Tresslyn suavely. "She *does* feel, I've no doubt, that it would be a tax on her strength and nerves. In a few days, I'm sure, she will feel differently." She thought she had sensed Anne's reason for hesitating. Mrs. Tresslyn had been speechless with dismay — or perhaps it was indignation

— up to this moment. She had had a hard fight to control her emotions.

"We need not discuss it now, at any rate," said Anne. She found it extremely difficult to keep from looking at Braden as she spoke. Something told her that he was looking hard at her. She kept her face averted.

"Quite right, quite right," said Judge Hollenback. "I hope you will forgive me, Braden, for mentioning your — er — theories,— the theories which inspired the somewhat disturbing clause in your grandfather's will. I feel that it is my duty to explain my position in the matter. I was opposed to the creation of this fund. I tried to make your grandfather see the utter fallacy of his — shall we call it whim? Now, I will not put myself in the attitude of denying the true humanity of your theory. I daresay it has been discussed by physicians for ages. It was my aim to convince your grandfather that all the money in the world cannot bring about the result you desire. I argued from the legal point of view. There are the insurance companies to consider. They will put obstacles in the way of —"

"Pardon me, Judge Hollenback," interrupted Braden steadily. "I do not advocate an illegal act. We need not discuss my theories, however. The absurdity of the clause in my grandfather's will is as clear to me as it is to you. The conditions cannot be carried out. I shall refuse to accept this trusteeship."

Judge Hollenback stared. "But, my dear friend, you must accept. What is to become of the — er — money if you refuse to act? You can't possibly refuse. There is no other provision for the disposition of the estate. He has put it squarely up to you. There is no other solution. You may be sure, sir, that I do not care what you do with the money, and I fancy no one else *will* undertake to define your —"

"Just the same, sir, I cannot and will not accept," said Braden, finality in his tone. "I cannot tell you how shocked, how utterly overwhelmed I am by —"

Simmy interrupted him. "I'd suggest, old fellow, that you take Mr. Thorpe's letter to your rooms and read it. Take time to think it all out for yourself. Don't go off half-cocked like this."

"You at least owe it to yourself and to your grandfather —" began Judge Hollenback soothingly, but was cut short by Braden, who arose and turned to the door. There he stopped and faced them.

"I'm sorry, Judge Hollenback, but I must ask you to consider the matter closed. I shall leave you and Mr. Dodge to find a satisfactory solution. In the first place, I am a practising physician and surgeon. I prefer to regulate my own life and my life's work. I need not explain to you just how deeply I am interested in the saving of human life. That comes first with me. My theories, as you call them, come second. I cannot undertake the promotion of these theories as a salaried advocate. This is the only stupid and impractical thing that my grandfather ever did, I believe. He must have known that the terms of the will could not be carried out. Mr. Dodge is right. It was his way of leaving the property to me after declaring that he would not do so, after adding the codicil annulling the bequest intended for me. He broke a solemn compact. Now he has made the situation absolutely impossible. I shall not act as trustee of this fund, and I shall not use a penny of the fortune 'as I see fit,' Judge Hollenback. There must be some other channel into which all this money can be diverted without —"

"There is no provision, sir, as I said before," said Judge Hollenback testily. "It can only be released by an act of yours. *That is clear*, quite clear."

"Then, I shall find a way," said Braden resolutely. "I shall go into court and ask to have the will set aside as —"

"That's it, sir, that's it," came an eager voice from an unexpected quarter. Wade was leaning forward in his chair, visibly excited by the prospect of relief. "I can testify, sir, that Mr. Thorpe acted strangely,— yes, very queerly,— during the past few months. I should say that he was of unsound mind." Then, as every eye was upon him, he subsided as suddenly as he had begun.

"Shut up!" whispered Murray, murderously, bending over, the better to penetrate his ear. "You damn fool!"

Judge Hollenback indulged in a frosty smile. "Mr. Wade is evidently bewildered." Then, turning to Braden, he said: "Mr. Dodge's advice is excellent. Think the matter over for a few days and then come to see me."

"I am placed in a most unhappy position," said Braden, with dignity. "Mrs. Thorpe appreciates my feelings, I am sure. She was led to believe, as I was, that my grandfather had left me out of his will. Such a thing as this subterfuge never crossed my mind, nor hers. I wish to assure her, in the presence of all of you, that I was as completely ignorant of all this —"

"I know it, Braden," interrupted Anne. "I know that you had nothing to do with it. And for that reason I feel that you should accept the trust that is —"

"Anne!" cried out Braden, incredulously. "You cannot mean it. You —"

"I do mean it," she said firmly. "It is your greatest justification. You should carry out his wishes. He does not leave you the money outright. You may do as you please with it, to be sure, but why should you agree

with Simmy that it may be converted solely to your own private uses? Why should you feel that he intended you to have it all for your own? Does he not set forth explicitly just what uses it is to be put to by you during your lifetime? He puts you on your honour. He knew what he was about when he overruled Judge Hollenback's objection. He knew that this trust would be safe in your hands. Yes, Braden, he knew that you would not spend a penny of it on yourself."

He was staring at her blankly. Mrs. Tresslyn was speaking now, but it is doubtful if he heard a word that she uttered. He was intent only upon the study of Anne's warm, excited face.

"Mr. Thorpe assured me a little over a year ago," began Anne's mother, a hard light in her eyes, "that it was his determination to leave his grandson out of his will altogether. It was his desire,— or at least, so he said,— to remove from Braden's path every obstacle that might interfere with his becoming a great man and a credit to his name. By that, of course, he meant money unearned. He told me that most of his fortune was to go to Charitable and Scientific Institutions. I had his solemn word of honour that his grandson was to be in no sense a beneficiary under his will. He —"

"Please, mother!" broke in Anne, a look of real shame in her eyes.

"And so how are we to reconcile this present foolishness with his very laudable display of commonsense of a year ago?" went on Mrs. Tresslyn, the red spot darkening in her cheek. "He played fast and loose with all of us. I agree with Braden Thorpe. There was treachery in —"

"Ahem!" coughed Judge Hollenback so loudly and so pointedly that the angry sentence was not completed.

Mrs. Tresslyn was furious. She had been cheated,

and Anne had been cheated. The old wretch had played a trick on all of them! He had bought Anne for two millions, and now *nothing*,— absolutely *nothing* was to go to Charity! Braden was seven times a millionaire instead of a poor but ambitious seeker after fame!

In the few minutes that followed Judge Hollenback's cough, she had time to restore her equanimity to its habitual elevation. It had, for once, stooped perilously near to catastrophe.

Meanwhile, her son George had arrived at a conclusion. He arose from his chair with a wry face and a half uttered groan, and crossed over to Braden's side. Strange, fierce pains were shooting through all the joints and muscles of his body.

"See here, Brady, I'd like to ask a question, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind. What is it?"

"Would you have operated on Mr. Thorpe if you'd known what was in this will?"

Braden hesitated, but only for a second. "Yes. My grandfather asked me to operate. There was nothing else for me to do under the circumstances."

"That's just what I thought. Well, all I've got to say is that so long as you respected his wishes while he was alive it seems pretty rotten in you to take the stand you're taking now."

"What do you mean?"

"He virtually asked you to make an end of him. You both knew there was no chance. You operated and he died. I'm speaking plainly, you see. No one blames you. You did your best. But it seems to me that if you could do what he asked you to do at that time, you ought to do what he asks of you now. As long as you were willing to respect his last wish alive, you ought *not to* stir up a rumpus over his first wish dead."

The two men were looking hard into each other's eyes. George's voice shook a little, but not from fear or nervousness. He was shivering with the chill that precedes fever.

Anne drew a step or two nearer. She laid an appealing hand on George's arm.

"I think I understand you, George," said Thorpe slowly. "You are telling me that you believe I took my grandfather's life by design. You —"

"No," said George quietly, "I'm not saying that, Brady. I'm saying that you owe as much to him now as you did when he was alive. If you had not consented to operate, this will would never have been drawn. If you had refused, the first will would have been read to-day. I guess you are entirely responsible for the making of this new will, and that's why I say you ought to be man enough to stand by your work."

Thorpe turned away. His face was very white and his hands were clenched.

Anne shook her brother's arm. "Why,— oh, why did you say that to him, George? Why —"

"Because it ought to have been said to him," said George coolly; "that's why. He made old Mr. Thorpe see things from his point of view, and it's up to him to shoulder the responsibility."

Mrs. Tresslyn spoke to Murray. "Is there any reason why we shouldn't have tea, Murray? Serve it, please." She turned to Judge Hollenback. "I don't see any sense in trying to settle all the little details to-day, do you, Judge Hollenback? We've done all that it is possible to do to-day. The will has been read. That is all we came for, I fancy. I confess that I am astonished by several of the provisions, but the more I think of them the less unreasonable they seem to be. We have no*thing to quarrel* about. Every one appears

to be satisfied except Dr. Thorpe, so let us have tea — and peace. Sit down, Braden. You can't decide the question to-day. It has too many angles."

Braden lifted his head. "Thank you, Mrs. Tresslyn; I shall not wait. At what hour may I see you to-morrow, Judge Hollenback?"

"Name your own hour, Braden."

"Three o'clock," said Braden succinctly. He turned to George. "No hard feelings, George, on my part."

"Nor on mine," said George, extending his hand. "It's just my way of looking at things lately. No offence was meant, Brady. I'm too fond of you for that."

"You've given me something to think about," said Thorpe. He bowed stiffly to the ladies and Judge Hollenback. George stepped out into the hall with him.

"I intend to stick pretty close to Anne, Brady," he said with marked deliberation. "She needs me just now."

Thorpe started. "I don't get your meaning, George."

"There will be talk, old man,— talk about you and Anne. Do you get it now?"

"Good heaven! I — yes, I suppose there will be all sorts of conjectures," groaned Braden bitterly. "People remember too well, George. You may rest easy, however. I shall not give them any cause to talk. As for coming to this house again, I can tell you frankly that as I now feel I could almost make a vow never to enter its doors again as long as I live."

"Well, I just thought I'd let you know how I stand in the matter," said George. "I'm going to try to look out for Anne, if she'll let me. Good-bye, Brady. I hope you'll count me as one of your friends, if you *think* I'm worth while. I'm — I'm going to make a

fresh start, you know." He grinned, and his teeth chattered.

"You'd better go to bed," said Braden, looking at him closely. "Tell Anne that I said so, and — you'd better let a doctor look you over, too."

"I haven't much use for doctors," said George, shaking his head. "I wanted to kill you last winter when you cut poor little Lutie — Oh, but of course you understand. I was kind of dotty then, I guess. So long."

Simmy came to the library door and called out: "I'll be with you in a second, Brady. I'm going your way, and I don't care which way you're going. My car's outside." Re-entering the room, Mr. Dodge walked up to Anne and actually shook her as a parent would shake a child. "Don't be silly about it, Anne. You've got to accept the house. He left it to you without —"

"I cannot live up to the conditions. The will says that I must continue to make this place my home, that I must reside here for — Oh! I cannot do it, that's all, Simmy. I would go mad, living here. There is no use discussing the matter. I will not take the house."

"'Pon my soul," sighed Judge Hollenback, "the poor man seems to have made a mess of everything. He can't even give his property away. No one will take it. Braden refuses, Mrs. Thorpe refuses, Wade is dissatisfied — Ah, yes, Murray seems to be pleased. One lump, Mrs. Tresslyn, and a little cream. Now as for Wade's attitude — by the way, where is the man?"

Wade was at the lower end of the hall, speaking earnestly in a tremulous undertone to Braden Thorpe.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Braden, there's only one thing to do. We've got to have it set aside, declared void. You may count on me, sir. I'll swear to his actions. Crazy as a loon, sir,— crazy as a loon."

CHAPTER XIX

TWO days later George Tresslyn staggered weakly into Simmy Dodge's apartment. He was not alone. A stalwart porter from an adjacent apartment building was supporting him when Dodge's man opened the door.

"This Mr. Dodge?" demanded the porter.

"Mr. Dodge's man. Mr. Dodge isn't at 'ome," said Baffly quickly.

"All right," said the porter, pushing past the man and leading George toward a couch he had observed from the open door. "This ain't no jag, Johnny. He's sick. Out of his head. Batty. Say, don't you know him? Am I in wrong? He said he wanted to come here to —"

George had tossed himself, sprawling, upon the long couch. His eyes were closed and his breathing was stertorous.

"Of course I know him. What — what is the matter with him? My Gawd, man, don't tell me he is dying. What do you mean, bringing 'im 'ere? There will be a coroner's hinquest and —"

"You better get a doctor first. Waste no time. Get the coroner afterward if you have to. You tell Mr. Dodge that he came into our place half an hour ago and said he wanted to go up to his friend's apartment. He was clean gone then. He wanted to lick the head porter for saying Mr. Dodge didn't live in the buildin'. We saw in a minute that he hadn't been drinkin'. Just as we was about to call an ambulance, a gentleman in our

building came along and reckonised him as young Mr. Tresslyn. Friend of Mr. Dodge's. That was enough for us. So I brings him around. Now it's up to you guys to look after him. Off his nut. My name's Jenks. Tell it to Mr. Dodge, will you? And git a doctor quick. Put your hand here on his head. Aw, he won't bite you! Put it *here*. Ever feel anything as hot as that?"

Baffly arose to the occasion. "Mr. Dodge 'as been hexpecting Mr. Tresslyn. He will also be hexpecting you, Mr. Jenks, at six o'clock this evening."

"All right," said Mr. Jenks.

Baffly put George Tresslyn to bed and then called up Mr. Dodge's favourite club. He never called up the office except as a last resort. If Mr. Dodge wasn't to be found at any one of his nine clubs, or at certain restaurants, it was then time for calling up the office. Mr. Dodge was not in the club, but he had left word that if any one called him up he could be found at his office.

"Put him to bed and send for Dr. Thorpe," was Simmy's order a few minutes later.

"I've put 'im to bed, sir."

"Out of his head, you say?"

"I said, 'Put 'im to bed, sir,'" shouted Baffly.

"I'll be home in half-an-hour, Baffly."

Simmy called up Anne Thorpe at once and reported that George had been found and was now in his rooms. He would call up later on. She was not to worry,—and good-bye!

It appears that George Tresslyn had been missing from the house near Washington Square since seven o'clock on the previous evening. At that hour he left his bed, to which Dr. Bates had ordered him, and made off in the cold, sleety night, delirious with the fierce

fever that was consuming him. As soon as his plight was discovered, Anne called up Simmy Dodge and begged him to go out in search of her sick, and now irresponsible brother. In his delirium, George repeatedly had muttered threats against Braden Thorpe for the cruel and inhuman "slashing of the most beautiful, the most perfect body in all the world," "marking for life the sweetest girl that God ever let live"; and that he would have to account to him for "the dirty work he had done."

Acting on this hint, Simmy at once looked up Braden Thorpe and put him on his guard. Thorpe laughed at his fears, and promptly joined in the search for the sick man. They thought of Lutie, of course, and hurried to her small apartment. She was not at home. Her maid-servant said that she did not know where she could be found. Mrs. Tresslyn had gone out alone at half-past seven, to dine with friends, but had left no instructions, — a most unusual omission, according to the young woman.

It was a raw, gusty night. A fine, penetrating sleet cut the face, and the sharp wind drove straight to the marrow of the most warmly clad. Tresslyn was wandering about the streets, witless yet dominated by a great purpose, racked with pain and blind with fever, insufficiently protected against the gale that met his big body as he trudged doggedly into it in quest of — what? He had left Anne's home without overcoat, gloves or muffler. His fever-struck brain was filled with a resolve that deprived him of all regard for personal comfort or safety. He was out in the storm, looking for some one, and whether love or hate was in his heart, no man could tell.

All night long Dodge and Thorpe looked for him, aided in their search by three or four private detectives

who were put on the case at midnight. At one o'clock the two friends reappeared at Lutie's apartment, summoned there by the detective who had been left on guard with instructions to notify them when she returned.

It was from the miserable, conscience-stricken Lutie that they had an account of George's adventures earlier in the night. White-faced, scared and despairing, she poured out her unhappy tale of triumph over love and pity. The thing that she had longed for, though secretly dreaded, had finally come to pass. She had seen her former husband in the gutter, degraded, besotted, thoroughly reduced to the level from which nothing save her own loyal, loving efforts could lift him. She had dreamed of a complete conquest of caste, and the remaking of a man. She had dreamed of the day when she could pick up from the discarded of humanity this splendid, misused bit of rubbish and in triumph claim it as her own, to revive, to rebuild, to make over through the sure and simple processes of love! This had been Lutie Tresslyn's notion of revenge!

She saw George at eight o'clock that night. As she stood in the shelter of the small canvas awning protecting the entrance to the building in which she lived, waiting for the taxi to pull up, her eyes searched the swirling shadows up and down the street. She never failed to look for the distant and usually indistinct figure of *her man*. It had become a habit with her. The chauffeur had got down to crank his machine, and there was promise of a no inconsiderable delay in getting the cold engine started. She was on the point of returning to the shelter of the hallway, when she caught sight of a tall, shambling figure crossing the street obliquely, and at once recognised George Tresslyn. He was staggering. The light from the entrance revealed his white,

convulsed face. Her heart sank. She had never seen him so drunk, so disgusting as this! The taxi-cab was twenty or thirty feet away. She would have to cross a wet, exposed space in order to reach it before George could come up with her. She realised with a quiver of alarm that it was the first time in all these months that he had ventured to approach her. It was clear that he now meant to accost her,— he might even contemplate violence! She wanted to run, but her feet refused to obey the impulse. Fascinated she watched the unsteady figure lurching toward her, and the white face growing more and more distinct and forbidding as it came out of the darkness. Suddenly she was released from the spell. Like a flash she darted toward the taxi-cab. From behind came a hoarse cry.

"Lutie! For God's sake —"

"Quick!" she cried out to the driver. "Open the door! Be quick!"

The engine was throbbing. She looked back. George was supporting himself by clinging to one of the awning rods. His legs seemed to be crumbling beneath his weight. Her heart smote her. He had no overcoat. It was a bare hand that gripped the iron rod and a bare hand that was held out toward her. Thank heaven, he had stopped there! He was not coming on.

"Lutie! Oh, Lutie!" came almost in a wail from his lips. Then he began to cry out something incoherent, maudlin, unintelligible.

"Never mind him," said the driver reassuringly. "Just a souse. Wants to make a touch, madam. Streets are full of 'em these cold nights. He won't bone you while I'm here. Where to?" He was holding the door open.

Lutie hesitated. Long afterwards she recalled the

strange impulse that came so near to sending her back to the side of the man who cried out to her from the depths of a bottomless pit. Something whispered from her heart that *now was her time,— now!* And then came the loud cry from her brain, drowning the timid voice of the merciful: "Wait! Wait! Not now! To-morrow!"

And while she stood there, uncertain, held inactive by the two warring emotions, George turned and staggered away, reeling, and crying out in a queer, raucous voice.

"They'll get him," said the driver.

"Who will get him?" cried Lutie, shrilly.

"The police. He —"

"No! No! It must not be *that*. That's not what I want,— do you hear, driver? Not that. He must not be locked up — Oh!" George had collapsed. His knees went from under him and he was half-prostrate on the curb. "Oh! He has fallen! He has hurt himself! Go and see, driver. Go at once." She forgot the sleet and the wind, and stood there wide-eyed and terrified while the man shuffled forward to investigate. She hated him for stirring the fallen man with his foot, and she hated him when he shook him violently with his hands.

"I better call a cop," said the man. "He's pretty full. He'll freeze if — I know how it is, ma'am. I used to hit it up a bit myself. I —"

"Listen!" cried Lutie, regaining the shelter of the awning, where she stopped in great perturbation. "Listen; you must put him in your cab and take him somewhere. I will pay you. Here! Here is five dollars. Don't mind me. I will get another taxi. Be quick! There is a policeman coming. I see him,— here by —"

"Gee! I don't know where to take him. I —"

"You can't leave him lying there in the gutter, man," she cried fiercely. "The gutter! The gutter! My God, what a thing to happen to —"

"Here! Get up, you!" shouted the driver, shaking George's shoulder. "Come along, old feller. I'll look out for you. Gee! He weighs a ton."

Tresslyn was mumbling, half audibly, and made little or no effort to help his unwilling benefactor, who literally dragged him to his feet.

"Is — is he hurt?" cried Lutie, from the doorway.

"No. Plain souse."

"Where will you take him?"

The man reflected. "It wouldn't be right to take him to his home. Maybe he's got a wife. These fellers beat 'em up when they get like this."

"A wife? Beat them up — oh, you don't know what you are saying. He —"

At this juncture George straightened out his powerful figure, shook off the Samaritan and with a loud, inarticulate cry rushed off down the street. The driver looked after the retreating figure in utter amazement.

"By Gosh! Why — why; he ain't any more drunk than I am," he gasped. "Well, can you beat that? All bunk! It beats thunder what these panhandlers will do to pick up a dime or two. He was — say, he saw the cop, that's what it was. Lord, look at him go!"

Tresslyn was racing wildly toward the corner. Lutie, aghast at this disgusting exhibition of trickery, watched the flying figure of her husband. She never knew that she was clinging to the arm of the driver. She only knew that her heart seemed to have turned to lead. As he turned the corner and disappeared from view, she found her voice and it seemed that it was not her own.

He had swerved widely and almost lost his feet as he made the turn. He *was* drunk! Her heart leaped with joy. He *was* drunk. He had not tried to trick her.

"Go after him!" she cried out, shaking the man in her agitation. "Find him! Don't let him get away. I—"

But the policeman was at her elbow.

"What's the matter here?" he demanded.

"Panhandler," said the driver succinctly.

"Just a poor wretch who — who wanted enough for — for more drink, I suppose," said Lutie, warily. Her heart was beating violently. She was immensely relieved by the policeman's amiable grunt. It signified that the matter was closed so far as he was concerned. He politely assisted her into the taxi-cab and repeated her tremulous directions to the driver. As the machine chortled off through the deserted street, she peered through the little window at the back. Her apprehensions faded. The officer was standing where she had left him.

Then came Thorpe and Simmy Dodge in the dead hour of night and she learned that she had turned away from him when he was desperately ill. Sick and tortured, he had come to her and she had denied him. She looked so crushed, so pathetic that the two men undertook to convince her that she had nothing to fear,— they would protect her from George!

She smiled wanly, shook her head, and confessed that she did not want to be protected against him. She wanted to surrender. She wanted *him* to protect her. Suddenly she was transformed. She sprang to her feet and faced them, and she was resolute. Her voice rang with determination, her lips no longer drooped and trembled, and the appeal was gone from her eyes.

"He must be found, Simmy," she said imperatively. "Find him and bring him here to me. This is his home. I want him here."

The two men went out again, half an hour later, to scour the town for George Tresslyn. They were forced to use every argument at their command to convince her that it would be highly improper, in more ways than one, to bring the sick man to her apartment. She submitted in the end, but they were bound by a promise to take him to a hospital and not to the house of either his mother or his sister.

"He belongs to me," she said simply. "You must do what I tell you to do. They do not want him. I do. When you have found him, call me up, Simmy, and I will come. I shall not go to bed. Thank you,— both of you,— for — for —" She turned away as her voice broke. After a moment she faced them again. "And you will take charge of him, Dr. Thorpe?" she said. "I shall hold you to your promise. There is no one that I trust so much as I do you."

Thorpe was with the sick man when Simmy arrived at his apartment. George was rolling and tossing and moaning in his delirium, and the doctor's face was grave.

"Pneumonia," he said. "Bad, too,— devilish bad. He cannot be moved, Simmy."

Simmy did not blink an eye. "Then right here he stays," he said heartily. "Baffly, we shall have two nurses here for a while,— and we may also have to put up a young lady relative of Mr. Tresslyn's. Get the rooms ready. By Jove, Brady, he — he looks frightfully ill, doesn't he?" His voice dropped to a whisper. "Is he likely to — to — you know!"

"I think you'd better send for Dr. Bates," said Braden gravely. "I believe his mother and sister will

be better satisfied if you have him in at once, Simmy."

"But Lutie expressly —"

"I shall do all that I can to redeem my promise to that poor little girl, but we must consider Anne and Mrs. Tresslyn. They may not have the same confidence in me that Lutie has. I shall insist on having Dr. Bates called in."

"All right, if you insist. But — but you'll stick around, won't you, Brady?"

Thorpe nodded his head. He was watching the sick man's face very closely.

Half an hour later, Lutie Tresslyn and Anne Thorpe entered the elevator on the first floor of the building and went up together to the apartment of Simeon Dodge. Anne had lifted her veil,— a feature in her smart tribute to convention,— and her lovely features were revealed to the cast-off sister-in-law. For an instant they stared hard at each other. Then Anne, recovering from her surprise, bowed gravely and held out her hand.

"May we not forget for a little while?" she said.

Lutie shook her head. "I can't take your hand — not yet, Mrs. Thorpe. It was against me once, and I am afraid it will be against me again." She detected the faintest trace of a smile at the corners of Anne's mouth. A fine line appeared between her eyes. This fine lady could still afford to laugh at her! "I am going up to take care of my husband, Mrs. Thorpe," she added, a note of defiance in her voice. She was surprised to see the smile,— a gentle one it was,— deepen in Anne's eyes.

"That is why I suggested that we try to forget," she said.

Lutie started. "You — you do not intend to object to my —" she began, and stopped short, her eyes searching Anne's for the answer to the uncompleted question.

"I am not your enemy," said Anne quietly. She hesitated and then lowered the hand that was extended to push the button beside Simmy's door. "Before we go in, I think we would better understand each other, Lutie." She had never called the girl by her Christian name before. "I have nothing to apologise for. When you and George were married I did not care a pin, one way or the other. You meant nothing to me, and I am afraid that George meant but little more. I resented the fact that my mother had to give you a large sum of money. It was money that I could have used very nicely myself. Now that I look back upon it, I am frank to confess that therein lies the real secret of my animosity toward you. It didn't in the least matter to me whether George married you, or my mother's chambermaid, or the finest lady in the land. You will be surprised to learn that I looked upon myself as the one who was being very badly treated at the time. To put it rather plainly, I thought you were getting from my mother a great deal more than you were worth. Forgive me for speaking so frankly, but it is best that you should understand how I felt in those days so that you may credit me with sincerity now. I shall never admit that you deserved the thirty thousand dollars you took from us, but I now say that you were entitled to keep the man you loved and married. I don't care how unworthy you may have seemed to us, you should not have been compelled to take money for something you could not sell — the enduring love of that sick boy in there. My mother couldn't buy it, and you couldn't sell it. You have it still and always will have it, Lutie. I am glad that you have come to take care of him. You spoke of him as 'my husband' a moment ago. You were right. He *is* your husband. I,

for one, shall not oppose you in anything you may see fit to do. We do not appear to have been capable of preserving what you gave back to us — for better or for worse, if you please,— so I fancy we'd better turn the job over to you. I hope it isn't too late. I love my brother now. I suppose I have always loved him but I overlooked the fact in concentrating my affection on some one else,— and that some one was myself. You see I do not spare myself, Lutie, but you are not to assume that I am ashamed of the Anne Tresslyn who was. I petted and coddled her for years and I alone made her what she was, so I shall not turn against her now. There is a great deal of the old Anne in me still and I coddle her as much as ever. But I've found out something new about her that I never suspected before, and it is this new quality that speaks to you now. I ask you to try to forget, Lutie."

Throughout this long speech Lutie's eyes never left those of the tall young woman in black.

"Why do you call me Lutie?" she asked.

"Because it is my brother's name for you," said Anne.

Lutie lowered her eyes for an instant. A sharp struggle was taking place within her. She had failed to see in Anne's eyes the expression that would have made compromise impossible: the look of condescension. Instead, there was an anxious look there that could not be mistaken. She was in earnest. She could be trusted. The old barrier was coming down. But even as her lips parted to utter the words that Anne wanted to hear, suspicion intervened and Lutie's sore, tried heart cried out:

"You have come here to *claim* him! You expect me to stand aside and let you take him —"

"No, no! He is yours. I *did* come to help him, to nurse him, to be a real sister to him, but — that was before I knew that you would come."

"I am sorry I spoke as I did," said Lutie, with a little catch in her voice. "I — I hope that we may become friends, Mrs. Thorpe. If that should come to pass, I — am sure that I could forget."

"And you will allow me to help — all that I can?"

"Yes." Then quickly, jealously: "But he *belongs* to me. You must understand that, Mrs. Thorpe."

Anne drew closer and whispered in sudden admiration. "You are really a wonderful person, Lutie Carnahan. How *can* you be so fine after all that you have endured?"

"I suppose it is because I too happen to love myself," said Lutie drily, and turned to press the button. "We are all alike." Anne laid a hand upon her arm.

"Wait. You will meet my mother here. She has been notified. She has not forgiven you." There was a note of uneasiness in her voice.

Lutie looked at her in surprise. "And what has that to do with it?" she demanded.

Then they entered the apartment together.

CHAPTER XX

GEORGE TRESSLYN pulled through.

He was a very sick man, and he wanted to die. That is to say, he wanted to die up to a certain point and then he very much wanted to live. Coming out of his delirium one day he made a most incredible discovery, and at that very instant entered upon a dream that was never to end. He saw Lutie sitting at his bedside and he knew that it must be a dream. As she did not fade away then, nor in all the mysterious days that followed, he came to the conclusion that if he ever did wake up it would be the most horrible thing that could happen to him. It was a most grateful and satisfying dream. It included a wonderful period of convalescence, a delightful and ever-increasing appetite, a painless return voyage over a road that had been full of suffering on the way out, a fantastic experience in the matter of legs that wouldn't work and wobbled fearfully, a constant but properly subdued desire to sing and whistle — oh, it was a glorious dream that George was having!

For six weeks he was the uninvited guest of Simmy Dodge. Three of those weeks were terrifying to poor Simmy, and three abounded with the greatest joy he had ever known, for when George was safely round the corner and on the road to recovery, the hospitality of Simmy Dodge expanded to hitherto untried dimensions. Relieved of the weight that had pressed them down to an inconceivable depth, Simmy's spirits popped upward with an effervescence so violent that there was absolutely no containing them. They flowed all over the place.

All day long and most of the night they were active. He hated to go to bed for fear of missing an opportunity to do something to make everybody happy and comfortable, and he was up so early in the morning that if he hadn't been in his own house some one would have sent him back to bed with a reprimand.

He revelled in the establishment of a large though necessarily disconnected family circle. The nurses, the doctors, the extra servants, Anne's maid, Anne herself, the indomitable Lutie, and, on occasions, the impressive Mrs. Tresslyn,— all of these went to make up Simmy's family.

The nurses were politely domineering: they told him what he could do and what he could not do, and he obeyed them with a cheerfulness that must have shamed them. The doctors put all manner of restrictions upon him; the servants neglected to whisper when discussing their grievances among themselves; his French poodle was banished because canine hospitality was not one of the niceties, and furthermore it was most annoying to recent acquaintances engaged in balancing well-filled cups of broth in transit; his own luxurious bath-room was seized, his bed-chambers invested, his cosy living-room turned into a rest room which every one who happened to be disengaged by day or night felt free to inhabit. He had no privacy except that which was to be found in the little back bedroom into which he was summarily shunted when the occupation began, and he wasn't sure of being entirely at home there. At any time he expected a command to evacuate in favour of an extra nurse or a doctor's assistant. But through all of it, he shone like a gem of purest ray.

At the outset he realised that his apartment, commodious when reckoned as a bachelor's abode, was en-

tirely inadequate when it came to accommodating a company of persons who were not and never could be bachelors. Lutie refused to leave George; and Anne, after a day or two, came to keep her company. It was then that Simmy began to reveal signs of rare strategical ability. He invaded the small apartment of his neighbour beyond the elevator and struck a bargain with him. The neighbour and his wife rented the apartment to him furnished for an indefinite period and went to Europe on the bonus that Simmy paid. Here Anne and her maid were housed, and here also Mrs. Tresslyn spent a few nights out of each week.

He studied the nurses' charts with an avid interest. He knew all there was to know about temperature, respiration and nourishment; and developing a sudden sort of lordly understanding therefrom, he harangued the engineer about the steam heat, he cautioned the superintendent about noises, and he held many futile arguments with God about the weather. Something told him a dozen times a day, however, that he was in the way, that he was "a regular Marceline," and that if Brady Thorpe had any sense at all he would order him out of the house!

He began to resent the speed with which George's convalescence was marked. He was enjoying himself so immensely in his new environment that he hated to think of going back to the old and hitherto perfect order of existence. When Braden Thorpe and Dr. Bates declared one day that George would be able to go home in a week or ten days, he experienced a surprising and absolutely inexplicable sinking of the heart. He tried to persuade them that it would be a mistake to send the poor fellow out inside of a month or six weeks. That was the trouble with doctors, he said: they haven't any

sense. Suppose, he argued, that George were to catch a cold — why, the damp, spring weather would raise the dickens — Anne's house was a drafty old barn of a place, improperly heated,— and any fool could see that if George *did* have a relapse it would go mighty hard with him. Subsequently he sounded the nurses, severally, on the advisability of abandoning the poor, weak young fellow before he was safely out of the woods, and the nurses, who were tired of the case, informed him that the way George was eating he soon would be as robust as a dock hand. An appeal to Mrs. Tresslyn brought a certain degree of hope. That lady declared, quite bitterly, that inasmuch as her son did not seem inclined to return to *her* home he might do a great deal worse than to remain where he was, and it was some time before Simmy grasped the full significance of the remark.

He remembered hearing Lutie say that she was going to take George home with her as soon as he was able to be moved!

What was he to do with himself after all these people were gone? For the first time in his life he really knew what it meant to have a home, and now it was to be broken up. He saw more of his home in the five or six weeks that George was there than he had seen of it all told in years. He stayed at home instead of going to the club or the theatre or to stupid dinner parties. He hadn't the faintest idea that a place where a fellow did nothing but sleep and eat bacon and eggs could be looked upon as a "home." He had thought of it only as an apartment, or "diggings." Now he loved his home and everything that was in it. How he would miss the stealthy blue linen nurses, and the expressionless doctors, and the odour of broths and soups, and the scent

of roses, and the swish of petticoats, and the elevating presence of pretty women, and the fragrance of them, and the sweet chatter of them — Oh my, oh me-oh-my! If George would only get well in a more leisurely fashion!

Certain interesting events, each having considerable bearing upon the lives of the various persons presented in this narrative, are to be chronicled, but as briefly as possible so that we may get on to the results.

Naturally one turns first to the patient himself. He was the magnet that drew the various opposing forces together and, in a way, united them in a common enterprise, and therefore is of first importance. For days his life hung in the balance. Most of the time he was completely out of his head. It has been remarked that he thought himself to be dreaming when he first beheld Lutie at his bedside, and it now becomes necessary to report an entirely different sensation when he came to realise that he was being attended by Dr. Thorpe. The instant he discovered Lutie he manifested an immense desire to live, and it was this desire that sustained a fearful shock when his fever-free eyes looked up into the face of his doctor. Terror filled his soul. Almost his first rational words were in the form of a half-whispered question: "For God's sake, can't I get well? Is — is it hopeless?"

Braden was never to forget the anguish in the sick man's eyes, nor the sagging of his limp body as if all of his remaining strength had given way before the ghastly fear that assailed him. Thorpe understood. He knew what it was that flashed through George's brain in that first moment of intelligence. His heart sank. Was it always to be like this? Were people to

live in dread of him?" His voice was husky as he leaned over and laid his hand gently upon the damp brow of the invalid.

"You are going to get well, George. You will be as sound as a rock in no time at all. Trust me, old fellow, — and don't worry."

"But that's what they always say," whispered George, peering straight into the other's eyes. "Doctors always say that. What are you doing here, Brady? Why have you been called in to —"

"Hush! You're all right. Don't get excited. I have been with you from the start. Ask Lutie — or Anne. They will tell you that you are all right."

"I don't want to die," whined George. "I only want a fair chance. Give me a chance, Brady. I'll show you that I —"

"My God!" fell in agonised tones from Thorpe's lips, and he turned away as one condemned.

When Lutie and Anne came into the room soon afterward, they found George in a state of great distress. He clutched Lutie's hand in his strong fingers and drew her down close to him so that he could whisper furtively in her ear.

"Don't let any one convince you that I haven't a chance to get well, Lutie. Don't let him talk you into anything like that. I won't give my consent, Lutie,— I swear to God I won't. He can't do it without my consent. I've just got to get well. I can do it if I get half a chance. I depend on you to stand out against any —"

Lutie managed to quiet him. Thorpe had gone at once to her with the story and she was prepared. For a long time she talked to the frightened boy, and at last

he sank back with a weak smile on his lips, confidence partially restored.

Anne stood at the head of the bed, out of his range of vision. Her heart was cold within her. It ached for the other man who suffered and could not cry out. *This* was but the beginning for him.

In a day or two George's attitude toward Braden underwent a complete change, but all the warmth of his enthusiastic devotion could not drive out the chill that had entered Thorpe's heart on that never-to-be-forgotten morning.

Then there were the frequent and unavoidable meetings of Anne and her former lover. For the better part of three weeks Thorpe occupied a room in Simmy's apartment, to be constantly near his one and only patient. He suffered no pecuniary loss in devoting all of his time and energy to young Tresslyn. Ostensibly he was in full charge of the case, but in reality he deferred to the opinions and advice of Dr. Bates, who came once a day. He had the good sense to appreciate his own lack of experience, and thereby earned the respect and confidence of the old practitioner.

It was quite natural that he and Anne should come in contact with each other. They met in the sick-room, in the drawing-room, and frequently at table. There were times during the darkest hours in George's illness when they stood side by side in the watches of the night. But not once in all those days was there a word bearing on their own peculiar relationship uttered by either of them. It was plain that she had the greatest confidence in him, and he came, ere long, to regard her as a dependable and inspired help. Unlike the distracted, remorseful Lutie, she was the source of great inspiration to those who

worked over the sick man. Thorpe marvelled at first and then fell into the way of resorting to her for support and encouragement. He had discovered that she was not playing a game.

Templeton Thorpe's amazing will was not mentioned by either of them, although each knew that the subject lay uppermost in the mind of the other. The newspapers printed columns about the instrument. Reporters who laid in wait for Braden Thorpe, however, obtained no satisfaction. He had nothing to say. The same reporters fell upon Anne and wanted to know when she expected to start proceedings to have the will set aside. They seemed astonished to hear that there was to be no contest on her part. She could not tell them anything about the plans or intentions of Dr. Thorpe, and she had no opinion as to the ultimate effect of the "Foundation" upon the Constitution of the United States or the laws of God!

As a matter of fact, she was more eager than any one else to know the stand that Braden intended to take on the all-absorbing question. Notwithstanding her peculiar position as executrix of the will under which the conditions were created, she could not bring herself to the point of discussing the salient feature of the document with him. And so there the matter stood, unmentioned by either of them, and absolutely unsettled so far as the man most deeply involved was concerned.

Then came the day when Thorpe announced that it was no longer necessary for him to impose upon Simmy's hospitality, and that he was returning that evening to his hotel. George was out of danger. It was then that he said to Anne:

"You have been wonderful, Anne. I want to thank you for what you have done to help me. You might

have made the situation impossible, but — well, you didn't, that's all. I am glad that you and that poor little woman in there have become such good friends. You can do a great deal to help her — and George. She is a brick, Anne. You will not lose anything by standing by her now. As I said before, you can always reach me by telephone if anything goes wrong, and I'll drop in every morning to —"

"I want you to know, Braden, that I firmly believe you saved George for us. I shall not try to thank you, however. You did your duty, of course. We will let Lutie weep on your neck, if you don't mind, and you may take my gratitude for granted." There was a slightly satirical note in her voice.

His figure stiffened. "I don't want to be thanked," he said,—"not even by Lutie. You must know that I did not come into this case from choice. But when Lutie insisted I — well, there was nothing else to do."

"Would you have come if I had asked you?" she inquired, and was very much surprised at herself.

"No," he answered. "You would have had no reason for selecting me, and I would have told you as much. And to that I would have added a very good reason why you shouldn't."

"What do you mean?"

"I may as well be frank, Anne. People,— our own friends,— are bound to discuss us pretty thoroughly from now on. No matter how well we may understand each other and the situation, the rest of the world will not understand, simply because it doesn't want to do so. It will wait,— rather impatiently, I fear,— for the chance to say, 'I told you so.' Of course, you are sensible enough to have thought of all this, still I don't see why I shouldn't speak of it to you."

"Has it occurred to you that our friends may b justified in thinking that I *did* call upon you to tak this case, Braden?" she asked quietly.

He frowned. "I daresay that is true. I hadn' thought of it —"

"They also believe that I summoned you to tak charge of my husband a few weeks ago. No one ha advised the world to the contrary. And now that you are here, in the same house with me, what do you suppose they will say?" A queer little smile played about her lips, a smile of diffidence and apology.

He gave her a quick look of inquiry. "Surely no one will —"

"They will say the Widow Thorpe's devotion to her brother was not her only excuse for moving into good old Simmy's apartment, and they will also say that Dr. Thorpe must be singularly without practice in order to give all of his time to a solitary case."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Anne," he cried impatiently, "give people credit for having a little commonsense and charity. They —"

"I don't give them credit for having anything of the kind," she said coolly, "when it comes to discussing their fellow creatures. I hope you are not distressed, Braden. As you have said, people will discuss us. We cannot escape the consequences of being more or less public institutions, you and I. Of course they will talk about our being here together. I knew that when I came here three weeks ago."

"Then why did you come?" he demanded.

She replied with a directness that shamed him. "Because I do not want people to talk about Lutie. That is one reason. Another is that I wanted to do my share in looking after George." Suddenly her eyes narrowed

"You — you do not imagine that I — I — you couldn't have thought *that* of me, Braden."

He shook his head slowly. "If I had thought *that*, Anne, I should not have told you a moment ago that you were wonderful," he said.

Few women would have been content to let it go at that. It is the prerogative of woman to expect more than a crumb, and, if it is not forthcoming from others, to gratify the appetite by feeding confidently upon herself. In this instance, Anne might have indulged herself in the comfort of a few tremulous words of self-justification, and even though they drew nothing in exchange, she would at least have had the pleasure of uttering them, and the additional satisfaction of knowing that he would have to listen to them, whether or no. But she was far too intelligent for that. Her good sense overcame the feminine craving; she surprised him by holding her tongue.

He waited for a second or two and then said: "Good-bye. I shall drop in to-morrow to see George."

She held out her hand. "He swears by you," she said, with a smile.

For the first time in more than a year, their hands touched. Up to this moment there had not been the remotest evidence of an inclination on the part of either to bridge the chasm that lay between them. The hand-clasp was firm but perfunctory. She had herself under perfect control. It is of importance to note, however, that later on she pressed her hand to her lips, and that there were many times during the day when she looked at it as if it were something unreal and apart from her own physical being.

"Thank heaven he doesn't feel toward me as he did last week," he said fervently. "I shall never get over

that awful moment. I shall never forget the look of despair that —"

"I know," she interrupted. "I saw it too. But it is gone now, so why make a ghost of it? Don't let it haunt you, Braden."

"It is easy to say that I shouldn't let it —"

"If you are going to begin your life's work by admitting that you are thin-skinned, you'll not get very far, my friend," she said seriously. "Good-bye."

She smiled faintly as she turned away. He was never quite sure whether it was encouragement or mockery that lay in her dark eyes when she favoured him with that parting glance. He stood motionless until she disappeared through the door that opened into the room where George was lying; his eyes followed her slender, graceful figure until she was gone from sight. His thoughts leaped backward to the time when he had held that lovely, throbbing, responsive body close in his arms, to the time when he had kissed those sensitive lips and had found warmth and passion in them, to the time when he had drunk in the delicate perfume of her hair and the seductive fragrance of her body. That same slender, adorable body had been pressed close to his, and he had trembled under the enchantment it held.

He went away plagued and puzzled by an annoying question that kept on repeating itself without answer; was it in his power now to rouse the old flame in her blood, to revive the tender fires that once consumed her senses when he caressed her? Would she be proof against him if he set out to reconquer? She seemed so serene, so sure of herself. Was it a pose or had love really died within her?

By no means the least important of the happenings in

Simmy's house was the short but decisive contest that took place between Lutie and Mrs. Tresslyn. They met first in the sick-room, and the shock was entirely one-sided. It was George's mother who sustained it. She had not expected to find the despised "outcast" there. For once her admirable self-control was near to being shattered. If she had been permitted to exercise the right of speech at that crucial moment, she would have committed the irretrievable error of denouncing the brazen creature in the presence of disinterested persons. Afterwards she thanked her lucky stars for the circumstances which compelled her to remain angrily passive, for she was soon to realise what such an outburst would have brought upon her head.

She took it out on Anne, as if Anne were wholly to blame for the outrage. Anne had the temerity,— the insolence, Mrs. Tresslyn called it,— to advise her to make the best of a situation that could not be helped. She held forth at some length for her daughter's benefit about "common decency," and was further shocked by Anne's complacency.

"I think she's behaving with uncommon decency," said Anne. "It isn't every one who would turn the other cheek like this. Let her alone. She's the best thing that can happen to George."

"My dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Tresslyn, aghast. "Of course, I shall not come to this apartment while she is here. That is out of the question."

"Inasmuch as Lutie was here first and means to stay, I am afraid you will have to reconsider that decision, mother,— provided you want to be near George."

"Did you speak of her as 'Lutie'?" demanded Mrs. Tresslyn, staring.

"I don't know what else to call her," said Anne.

"Simeon Dodge will appreciate my feelings,— my position —"

"Simmy is very much on her side, so I'd advise you to steer clear of him," said Anne impatiently. "Now, mother dear, don't upset things here. Don't make a fuss. Don't —"

"A fuss?" cried her mother, trying hard not to believe her ears.

"Don't make it any harder for poor old Simmy. He is in for a rough time of it. Tresslyns everywhere! It isn't a lovely prospect, you know. He will be fed up with us before — And, mother, don't overlook the fact that George is very ill. He may not pull through. He —"

"Of course he will get well. He's as strong as an ox. Don't be silly."

The next day she and Lutie met in the library and had it out,— briefly, as I said before, but with astounding clarity. Mrs. Tresslyn swept into the library at four in the afternoon, coming direct from her home, where, as she afterwards felt called upon to explain in self-defence, the telephone was aggravatingly out of order,— and that was why she hadn't called up to inquire! — (It is so often the case when one really wants to use the stupid thing!) She was on the point of entering the sick-room when Lutie came up from behind.

"I'm afraid you can't go in just now, Mrs. Tresslyn," she said, firmly and yet courteously.

George's mother started as if stung. "Oh!" she exclaimed, and her tone was so declaratory that it was not necessary to add the unspoken —"it's *you*, is it?"

"He is asleep," said Lutie gently. "They won't even allow *me* to go in."

This was too much for Mrs. Tresslyn. She transfixed the slight, tired-eyed young woman with a look that would have chilled any one else to the bone — the high-bred look that never fails to put the lowly in their places.

"Indeed," she said, with infinite irony in her voice. "This is Miss Carnahan, I believe?" She lifted her lorgnon as a further aid to inspection.

"I am the person you have always spoken of as Miss Carnahan," said Lutie calmly. Throughout the brief period in which she had been legally the wife of George Tresslyn, Lutie was never anything but Miss Carnahan to her mother-in-law. Mrs. Tresslyn very carefully forbore giving her daughter-in-law a respectable name. "I was afraid you might have forgotten me."

"You will forgive me if I confess that I have tried very hard to forget you, Miss Carnahan," said the older woman.

"It isn't my fault that you haven't been able to do so," said Lutie. "Please! you are not to go in." Mrs. Tresslyn's hand was turning the door-knob.

"I fear you are forgetting who I am," said she coldly.

"Oh, I know you're his mother, and all that," said Lutie, breathlessly. "I do not question your right to be with your son. That isn't the point. The nurse has ordered your daughter and me out of the room for awhile. It is the first wink of sleep he has had in heaven knows how long. So you cannot go in and disturb him, Mrs. Tresslyn."

Mrs. Tresslyn's hand fell away from the knob. For a moment she regarded the tense, agitated girl in silence.

"Has it occurred to you to feel — if you can feel at all — that you may not be wanted here, Miss Carna-

han?" she said, deliberately cruel. She towered above her adversary.

"Will you be kind enough to come away from the door?" said Lutie, wholly unimpressed. "It isn't very thick, and the sound of voices may penetrate —"

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed Mrs. Tresslyn, staring. "Do you presume to —"

"Not quite so loud, if you please. Come over here if you want to talk to me, Mrs. Tresslyn. Nurse's orders, not mine. I don't in the least mind what you say to me, or what you call me, or anything, but I do entreat you to think of George."

Greatly to her own surprise, Mrs. Tresslyn moved away from the door, and, blaming herself inwardly for the physical treachery that impelled her to do so, sat down abruptly in a chair on the opposite side of the room, quite as far removed from the door as even Lutie could have desired.

Lutie did not sit down. She came over and stood before the woman who had once driven her out. Her face was white and her eyes were heavy from loss of sleep, but her voice was as clear and sharp as a bell.

"We may as well understand each other, Mrs. Tresslyn," she said quietly. "Or, perhaps I'd better say that you may as well understand me. I still believe myself to be George's wife. A South Dakota divorce may be all right so far as the law is concerned, but it will not amount to *that*"— she snapped her fingers —"when George and I conclude to set it aside. I went out to that God-forsaken little town and stayed there for nearly a year, eating my heart out until I realised that it wasn't at all appetising. I lived up to my bargain, however. I made it my place of residence and I got my decree. I tore that hateful piece of paper up last night before I came here. You paid me thirty thousand dollars to give

George up, and he allowed you to do it. Now I have just this to say, Mrs. Tresslyn: if George gets well, and I pray to God that he may, I am going back to him, and I don't care whether we go through the form of marrying all over again or not. He is my husband. I am his wife. There never was an honest cause for divorce in our case. He wasn't as brave as I'd have liked him to be in those days, but neither was I. If I had been as brave as I am now, George wouldn't be lying in there a wreck and a failure. You may take it into your head to ask why I am here. Well, now you know. I'm here to take care of my husband."

Mrs. Tresslyn's steady, uncompromising gaze never left the face of the speaker. When Lutie paused after that final declaration, she waited a moment for her to resume.

"There is, of course," said she levelly, "the possibility that my son may not get well."

Lutie's eyes narrowed. "You mean that you'd rather see him die than —"

"Miss Carnahan, I am compelled to speak brutally to you. I paid you to give up my son. You took the money I proffered and the divorce I arranged for. You agreed to —"

"Just a moment, please. I took the money and — and *got out* in order to give George a chance to marry some one else and be happy. That was what you wanted, and what *you* promised me. You promised me that if I gave him up he would find some one else more worthy, that he would forget me and be happy, and that I would be forgotten inside of six months. Well, none of these things has happened. He hasn't found any one else, he still loves me, and he isn't happy. I am going back on my bargain, Mrs. Tresslyn, because you haven't carried out your part of it. If you think it was easy

for me to give him up when I did, you are very much mistaken. But that wouldn't interest you, so I'll say no more about it. We'll come down to the present, if you don't mind, and see where we stand. George needs me now, but no more than he has needed me all along. I intend to stick to him like a leech from this time on, Mrs. Tresslyn. You had your chance to make *your* kind of a man out of him, and I guess you'll admit that you failed. Well, I'm going to begin where you were content to leave off. You treated me like a dog, and God knows you've treated George but little better, although perhaps you didn't know what you were doing to him. He is down and out. You didn't expect things to turn out as they have. You thought I'd be the one to go to the devil. Now I'll put it up to you squarely. I still have the thirty thousand you gave me. It is nicely invested. I have lived comfortably on the income. A few years ago I sold George to you for that amount. Well, I'll buy him back from you to-morrow."

"Buy my son from me?" gasped Mrs. Tresslyn.

"You made it a business proposition three years ago, so I'll do the same now. I want to be fair and square with you. I'm going to take him back in any event, but I shall be a great deal better satisfied if you will let me pay for him."

Mrs. Tresslyn had recovered herself by this time. She gave the younger woman a frosty smile.

"And I suppose you will expect to get him at a considerably reduced price," she said sarcastically, "in view of the fact that he is damaged goods."

"You shall have back every penny, Mrs. Tresslyn," said Lutie, with dignity.

"How ingenuous you are. Do you really believe that I will *sell* my son to you?"

"*I* sold him to you," said the other, stubbornly.

Mrs. Tresslyn arose. "I think we would better bring this interview to an end, Miss Carnahan. I shall spare you the opinion I have formed of you in —"

"Just as you please, Mrs. Tresslyn," said Lutie calmly. "We'll consider the matter closed. George comes back to me at my own price. I —"

"My son shall never marry you!" burst out Mrs. Tresslyn, furiously.

Lutie smiled. "It's good to see you mad, Mrs. Tresslyn. It proves that you are like other people, after all. Give yourself a chance, and you'll find it just as easy to be glad as it is to be mad, now that you've let go of yourself a little bit."

"You are insufferable! Be good enough to stand aside. I am going in to my son. He —"

"If you are so vitally interested in him, how does it happen that you wait until four o'clock in the afternoon to come around to inquire about him? I've been here on the job since last night — and so has your daughter. But you? Where have you been all this time, Mrs. Tresslyn?"

"God in heaven!" gasped Mrs. Tresslyn, otherwise speechless.

"If I had a son I'd be with him day and night at —"

"The telephone was out of order," began Mrs. Tresslyn before she could produce the power to check the impulse to justify herself in the eyes of this brazen tormentor.

"Indeed?" said Lutie politely.

"My son shall never marry you," repeated the other, helplessly.

"Well," began Lutie slowly, a bright spot in each cheek, "all I have to say is that he will be extremely unfair to your grandchildren, Mrs. Tresslyn, if he doesn't."

CHAPTER XXI

A GROUND-FLOOR window in an apartment building in Madison Avenue, north of Fifty-ninth street, displayed in calm black lettering the name "Dr. Braden L. Thorpe, M. D." On the panel of a door just inside the main entrance there was a bit of gold-leaf information to the effect that office hours were from 9 to 10 A. M. and from 2 to 4 P. M. There was a reception room and a consultation room in the suite. The one was quite as cheerless and uninviting as any other reception room of its kind, and the other possessed as many of the strange, terrifying and more or less misunderstood devices for the prolongation of uncertainty in the minds of the uneasy. During office-hours there was also a doctor there. Nothing was missing from this properly placarded and admirably equipped office, — nothing at all except the patients!

About the time that George Tresslyn fared forth into the world again, Thorpe hung out his shingle and sat himself down under his own gates to wait for the unwary. But no one came. The lame, the halt and even the blind had visions that were not to be dissipated by anything so trivial as a neat little sign in an office window. The name of Braden Thorpe was on the lips of every one. It was mentioned, not with horror or disgust, but as one speaks of the exalted genius whose cure for tuberculosis has failed, or of the man who found the North Pole by advertising in the newspapers, or of the books of Henry James. He was a person to steer clear of, that was all.

Every newspaper in the country discussed him editorially, paragraphically, and as an article of news. For weeks after the death of Templeton Thorpe and the publication of his will, not a day passed in which Braden Thorpe's outlandish assault upon civilisation failed to receive its country-wide attention in the press. And when editorial writers, medical sharps, legal experts and grateful reporters failed to avail themselves of the full measure of space set apart for their gluttony, ubiquitous " Constant Reader " rushed into print under many aliases and enjoyed himself as never before.

In the face of all this uproar, brought about by the posthumous utterance of old Templeton Thorpe, Braden had the courage,— or the temerity, if that is a truer word,— to put his name in a window and invite further attention to himself.

The world, without going into the matter any deeper than it usually does, assumed that he who entered the office of Dr. Thorpe would never come out of it alive!

The fact that Thorpe advocated something that could not conceivably become a reality short of two centuries made no impression on the world and his family. Dr. Thorpe believed that it was best to put sufferers out of their misery, and that was all there was to be said about the matter so far as Mr. Citizen was concerned.

It would appear, therefore, that all of Templeton Thorpe's ideas, hopes and plans concerning the future of his grandson were to be shattered by his own lack of judgment and foresight. Without intending to do so he had deprived the young man of all that had been given him in the way of education, training and character. Young Thorpe might have lived down or surmounted the prejudice that his own revolutionary utter-

ances created, but he could never overcome the stupendous obstacle that now lay in his path.

If Mr. Thorpe had hoped to create, or believed sincerely that it was possible to create, a force capable of overpowering the natural instincts of man, he had set for himself a task that could have but one result so far as the present was concerned, and it was in the present that Braden Thorpe lived, very far removed from the future that Mr. Thorpe appeared to be seeing from a point close by as he lay on his death-bed. He had completely destroyed the present usefulness of his grandson. He had put a blight upon him, and now he was sleeping peacefully where mockery could not reach him nor reason hold him to account.

The letter that the old man left for his grandson's guidance was an affectionate apology, very skilfully worded, for having, in a way, left the bulk of his fortune to the natural heir instead of to the great, consuming public. True, he did not put this in so many words, but it was obvious to the young man, if not to others who saw and read, that he was very clear in his mind as to the real purport and intention of the clause covering the foundation. He was careful to avoid the slightest expression that might have been seized upon by the young man as evidence of treachery on his part in view of the solemn promise he had made to leave to him no portion of his estate. On the surface, this letter was a simple, direct appeal to Braden to abide by the terms of the will, and to consider the trust as sacred in spite of the absence of restrictions. To Braden, there was but one real meaning to the will: the property was his to have, hold or dispose of as he saw fit. He was at liberty either to use every dollar of it in carrying out the expressed sentiments of the testa-

tor, or to sit back luxuriously and console himself with the thought that nothing was really expected of him.

The Foundation that received such wide-spread notice, and brought down upon his head, not the wrath but the ridicule of his fellow beings, was not to serve in any sense as a memorial to the man who provided the money with which the work was to be carried on. As a matter of fact, old Templeton Thorpe took very good care to stipulate plainly that it was not to be employed to any such end. He forbade the use of his name in any capacity except as one of the *supporters* of the movement. The whole world rose up at first and heaped anathemas on the name of Templeton Thorpe, and then, swiftly recovering its amiable tolerance of fools, forgot the dead and took its pleasure in " steering clear of the man who was left to hold the bag of gold," as some of the paragraphers would have it.

The people forgot old Templeton, and they also became a bit hazy about the cardinal principle of the Foundation, much as they forget other disasters, but they did not forget to look upon Braden Thorpe as a menace to mankind.

And so it was that after two months of waiting, he closed his office for the summer and disappeared from the city. He had not treated a solitary patient, nor had he been called in consultation by a single surgeon of his acquaintance, although many of them professed friendship for and confidence in him.

Six weeks later Simmy Dodge located his friend in a small coast town in Maine, practically out of the reach of tourists and not at all accessible to motorists. He had taken board and lodging with a needy villager who was still honest, and there he sat and brooded over the curse that his own intelligence had laid upon him.

He had been there for a month or more before he lifted his head, figuratively speaking, to look at the world again,— and he found it still bright and sparkling despite his desire to have it otherwise in order that he might be recompensed for his mood. Then it was that he wrote to Simmy Dodge, asking him to sell the furnishings and appliances in his office, sublet the rooms, and send to him as soon as possible the proceeds of the sale. He confessed frankly and in his straight-forward way that he was hard up and needed the money!

Now, it should be remembered that Braden Thorpe had very little means of his own, a small income from his mother's estate being all that he possessed. He had been dependent upon his grandfather up to the day he died. Years had been spent in preparing him for the personal achievements that were to make him famous and rich by his own hand. Splendid ability and unquestioned earning power were the result of Templeton Thorpe's faith in the last of his race. But nothing was to come of it. His ability remained but his earning power was gone. He was like a splendid engine from which the motive power has been shut off.

For weeks after leaving New York he had seen the world blackly through eyes that grasped no perspective. But he was young, he was made of the flesh that fights, and the spirit that will not down. He looked up from the black view that had held his attention so long, and smiled. It was not a gay smile but one in which there was defiant humour. After all, why shouldn't he smile? These villagers smiled cheerfully, and what had they in their narrow lives to cause them to see the world brightly? He was no worse off than they. If they could be content to live outside the world, why shouldn't he be as they? He was big and strong and young.

The fellows who went out to sea in the fishing boats were no stronger, no better than he. He could do the things that they were doing, and they sang while they went to and from their work.

It was the reviving spirit in him that opened his eyes to the lowly joys surrounding him. He found himself thinking with surprising interest that he could do what these men were doing and do it well, and after all what more can be expected of a man than that he should do some one thing well? He did not realise at the time that this small, mean ambition to surpass these bold fishermen was nothing less than the resurrection of dead hopes.

And so, when Simmy Dodge walked in upon him one day, expecting to find a beaten, discouraged skulker, he was confronted by a sun-browned, bare-armed, bright-eyed warrior whose smile was that of the man who never laughs,— the grim smile of him who thinks.

The lines in his face had deepened under the influence of sun and wind; there was a new, almost unnatural ruggedness about the man Simmy had seen less than two months before. The cheeks had the appearance of being sunken and there was an even firmer look to the strong chin and jaws than in the so recent past. Simmy looked at this new, hardy face and wondered whether two months in the rough world would do as much in proportion for his own self-despised countenance.

Thorpe had been up since five o'clock in the morning. For two weeks he had started off every morning at that hour with his landlord for the timberlands above the town, where they spent the day hewing out the sills and beams for a new boat-house. Unskilled at such labor, his duties were not those of the practised workman, but rather those of the " handy man " upon whom

falls the most arduous tasks as a rule. Thorpe's sinews were strained to the utmost in handling the long, unwieldy trunks of the fallen trees; his hands were blistered and his legs bruised, but the splendid muscles were no longer sore, nor was he so fatigued at day's-end that he could have "dropped in his tracks" right joyfully, — as he had felt like doing in the first week of his toiling.

"Well, I'll be jiggered," said Simmy, still holding Thorpe's hand as he backed away from him the better to take in this new and strange creature in overalls. Thorpe and his grizzled host had just come down from the woods with a load of pine logs, and had found the trim, immaculate little New Yorker waiting for them at the breakwater, directed thither by the housewife in the winding lane that was called High Street. "By the way, is your name Thorpe?" he added quizzically.

"Yep," said the graduate of three great universities, gripping the little man's hand a trifle harder. "All that is left of me is named Thorpe, Simmy."

"Have you — hired out as a — Good Lord, Brady, you're not as hard up as all that, are you?" Simmy's face was bleak with concern.

"I'm doing it for the fun of the thing," said Thorpe. "Next week I'm going out with the boats. I say, Simmy, have you a cigarette about your person? I haven't had a —"

Half an hour later, Simmy was seated in the cool little front porch with its screen of vines, the scent of the sea filling his sensitive nostrils, and he was drinking buttermilk.

"Now, see here, Brady, it's all damned tommyrot," he was saying,— and he had said something of the kind several times before in the course of their earnest con-

versation. "There's just one course open to you, and that's the right one. You've got to come back to New York and look people in the eye and tell 'em to go to Gehenna if they don't like what you're doing. You can't go on living like this, no matter how much you love it now. You're not cut out for this sort of thing. Lordy, if I was as big and brutal looking as you are at this minute I'd stand up for myself against —"

"But you will not understand," repeated Thorpe doggedly. "If my attainments, as you call them, are to be of no value to me in helping mankind, what is there left for me to do but this? Didn't I have enough of it in those horrible two months down there to prove to me that they hate me? They —"

"You weren't so thin skinned as all this when you were writing those inspired articles of yours, were you? Confound you, Brady, you invited all of this, you brought it down upon your head with all that nonsense about — why, it was you who converted old Templeton Thorpe and here you are running away like a 'whitehead.' Haven't you any back-bone?"

"That's all very well, Simmy, but of what value is a back-bone in a case like mine? If I had ten back-bones I couldn't compel people to come to me for treatment or advice. They are afraid of me. I am a doctor, a surgeon, a friend to all men. But if they will not believe that I am their friend, how can I be of service to them?"

"You'll get patients, and plenty of 'em too, if you'll just hang on and wait. They'll come to know that you wouldn't kill a cockroach if you could help it. You'll — what's the matter?" He broke off suddenly with this sharp question. A marked pallor had come over Thorpe's sunburnt face.

"Nothing — nothing at all," muttered the other. "The heat up there in the woods —"

"You must look out for that, old boy," said Simmy anxiously. "Go slow. You're only a city feller, as they'd say up here. What a God-forsaken place it is! Not more than two hundred miles from Boston and yet I was a whole day getting here."

"It is peaceful, Simmy," said Thorpe.

"I grant you that, by Jove. A fellow could walk in the middle of the street here for a solid year without being hit by an automobile. But as I was saying, you can make a place for yourself —"

"I should starve, old fellow. You forget that I am a poor man."

"Rats! You've got twenty-five thousand dollars a year, if you'll only be sensible. There isn't another man in the United States who would be as finicky about it as you are, no matter how full of ideals and principles he may be stuffed."

Thorpe looked up suddenly. His jaw was set hard and firm once more. "Don't you know what people would say about me if I were to operate and the patient died? — as some of them do, you know. They would say that I did it deliberately. I couldn't afford to lose in a single instance, Simmy. I couldn't take the chance that other surgeons are compelled to take in a great many cases. One failure would be sufficient. One —"

"See here, you've just got to look at things squarely, Braden. You owe something to your grandfather if not to yourself. He left all that money for a certain, definite purpose. You can't chuck it. You've got to come to taw. You say that he took this means of leav-

ing the money to you, that the trust thing is all piffle, and all that sort of thing. Well, suppose that it is true, what kind of a fool would you be to turn up your nose at six million dollars? There are all kinds of ways of looking at it. In the first place, he didn't leave it to you outright. It *is* a trust, or a foundation, and it has a definite end in view. You are the sole trustee, that's the point on which you elect to stick. You are to be allowed to handle this vast fortune as your judgment dictates, *as a trustee,* mind you. You forget that he fixed your real position rather clearly when he stipulated that you were to have a salary of twenty-five thousand dollars a year, and fees as a trustee. That doesn't look as though he left it to you without strings, does it?"

For an hour they argued the great question. Simmy did not pretend that he accepted Braden's theories; in fact, he pronounced them shocking. Still, he contended, that was neither here nor there. Braden believed in them, and it wasn't any affair of his, after all.

"I don't believe it is right for man to try to do God's work," said he, in explaining his objections. "But it doesn't matter what I think about it, old chap, so don't mind me."

"Can't you understand, Simmy, that I advocate a simple, direct means of relieving the —"

"Sure, I understand," broke in Simmy agreeably.

"Does God send the soldiers into battle, does he send the condemned man to the gallows? Man does that, doesn't he? If it is God's work to drop a small child into a boiling vat by accident, and if He fails to kill that child at once, why shouldn't it be the work of man to complete the job as quickly as possible? We shoot down the soldiers. Is that God's work? We hang the

murderer. Is that God's work? Emperors and kings conduct their wars in the name of God and thousands of God's creatures go down to death. Do you believe that God approves of this slaughter of the strong and hardy? God doesn't send the man to the gallows nor the soldier to the fighting line. Man does that, and he does it because he has the power to do it, and he lives serene in the consolation that the great, good God will not hold him to account for what he has done. We legalise the killing of the strong; but not for humane reasons. Why shouldn't we legalise the killing of the weak for humane reasons? It may interest you to know, Simmy, that we men have more merciful ways of ending life than God Himself directs. Why prolong life when it means agony that cannot be ended except by the death that so certainly waits a few days or weeks beyond —"

"How can you be sure that a man is going to die? Doctors very frequently say that a person has no chance whatever, and then the fellow fools 'em and gets well."

"I am not speaking of such cases. I only speak of the cases where there can be no doubt. There are such cases, you see. I would let Death take its toll, just as it has always done, and I would fight for my patient until the last breath was gone from his body. Two weeks ago a child was gored by a bull back here in the country. It was disembowelled. That child lived for many hours,— and suffered. That's what I mean, in substance. I too believe in the old maxim,—'while there's life there's hope.' That is the foundation on which our profession is built. A while ago you spoke of the extremely aged as possible victims of my theories. I suppose you meant to ask me if I would include them in my list. God forbid! To me there is nothing more beautiful than a happy, healthy, contented old age.

We love our old people. If we love them we do not think of them as old. We want them to live,— just as I shall want to live, and you, Simmy. And we want them to die when their time comes, by God's hand not man's, for God does give them a peaceful, glorious end. But we don't want them to suffer, any more than we would want the young to suffer. I loved my grandfather. Death was a great boon to him. He wanted to die. But all old men do not want to die. They —"

"We're not getting anywhere with this kind of talk," interrupted Simmy. "The sum and substance is this: you would put it in the power of a few men to destroy human life on the representation of a few doctors. If these doctors said —"

"And why not? We put it into the power of twelve men to send a man to the gallows on the testimony of witnesses who may be lying like thieves. We take the testimony of doctors as experts in our big murder trials. If we believe some of them we hang the man because they say he is sane. On the other hand we frequently acquit the guilty man if they say he's insane."

Simmy squinted a half-closed eye, calculatingly, judicially. "My dear fellow, the insane asylums in this country to-day hold any number of reasonably sane inmates, sent there by commissions which perhaps unintentionally followed out the plans of designing persons who were actuated solely by selfish and avaricious motives. Control of great properties falls into the hands of conspiring relatives simply because it happened to be an easy matter to get some one snugly into a madhouse." He said no more. Braden was allowed to draw his own conclusions.

"Oh, I dare say people will go on putting obstacles out of their way till the end of time," said he coolly.

"If I covet your wife or your ass or your money-bags I put poison in your tea and you very obligingly die, and all that the law can do is to send me after you as soon as the lawyers have got through with me. That is no argument, Simmy. That sort of thing will go on forever."

Finally Thorpe settled back in his chair resignedly, worn out by the persistent argument of his tormentor.

"Well, suppose that I agree with all you say,— what then? Suppose that I take up my burden, as you say I should, and set out to bring the world around to my way of thinking, where am I to begin and how?"

Simmy contrived to suppress the sigh of relief that rose to his lips. This was making headway, after all. Things looked brighter.

"My dear fellow, it will take you a good many years to even make a beginning. You can't go right smack up against the world and say: 'Here, you, look sharp! I'm going to hit you in the eye.' In the first place, you will have to convince the world that you are a great, big man in your profession. You will have to cure ten thousand people before you can make the world believe that you are anybody at all. Then people will listen to you and what you say will have some effect. You can't do anything now. Twenty years from now, when you are at the top of your profession, you will be in a position to do something. But in the meantime you will have to make people understand that you can cure 'em if anybody can, so that when you say *you* can't cure 'em, they'll know it's final. I'm not asking you to renounce your ideas. You can even go on talking about them and writing to the newspapers and all that sort of thing, if you want to, but you've got to build up a reputation for yourself before you can begin

to make use of all this money along the lines laid down for you. But first of all you must make people say that in spite of your theories you are a practical benefactor and not a plain, ordinary crank. Go on sowing the seed if you will, and then when the time comes found a college in which your principles may be safely and properly taught, and then see what people will say."

"It sounds very simple, the way you put it," said Thorpe, with a smile.

"There is no other way, my friend," said Simmy earnestly.

Thorpe was silent for a long time, staring out over the dark waters of the bay. The sun had slipped down behind the ridge of hills to the south and west, and the once bright sea was now cold and sinister and unsmiling. The boats were stealing in from its unfriendly wastes.

"I had not thought of it in that light, Simmy," he said at length. "My grandfather said it might take two hundred years."

"Incidentally," said Simmy, shrewdly, "your grandfather knew what he was about when he put in the provision that you were to have twenty-five thousand dollars a year as a salary, so to speak. He was a far-seeing man. He knew that you would have a hard, uphill struggle before you got on your feet to stay. He may even have calculated on a life-time, my friend. That's why he put in the twenty-five. He probably realised that you'd be too idiotic to use the money except as a means to bring about the millennium, and so he said to himself 'I'll have to do something to keep the damn' fool from starving.' You needn't have any scruples about taking your pay, old boy. You've got to

live, you know. I think I've got the old gentleman's idea pretty —"

"Well, let's drop the subject for to-night, Simmy," said Thorpe, coming to his feet. His chin was up and his shoulders thrown back as he breathed deeply and fully of the new life that seemed to spring up mysteriously from nowhere. "You'll spend the night with me. There is a spare bed and you'll —"

"Isn't there a Ritz in the place?" inquired Simmy, scarcely able to conceal his joy.

"Not so that you can notice it," replied Thorpe gaily. He walked to the edge of the porch and drank in more of that strange, puzzling air that came from vast distances and filled his lungs as they had never been filled before.

Simmy watched him narrowly in the failing light. After a moment he sank back comfortably in the old rocking chair and smiled as a cat might smile in contemplating a captive mouse. The rest would be easy. Thorpe would go back with him. That was all that he wanted, and perhaps more than he expected. As for old Templeton Thorpe's "foundation," he did not give it a moment's thought. Time would attend to that. Time would kill it, so what was the use worrying. He prided himself on having done the job very neatly,— and he was smart enough to let the matter rest.

"What is the news in town?" asked Braden, turning suddenly. There was a new ring in his voice. He was eager for news of the town!

"Well," said Simmy naïvely, "there is so much to tell I don't believe I could get it all out before dinner."

"We call it supper, Simmy."

"It's all the same to me," said Simmy.

And after supper he told him the news as they walked out along the breakwater.

Anne Thorpe was in Europe. She closed the house as soon as George was able to go to work, and went away without any definite notion as to the length of her stay abroad.

"She's terribly upset over having to live in that old house down there," said Simmy, "and I don't blame her. It's full of ghosts, good and bad. It has always been her idea to buy a big house farther up town. In fact, that was one of the things on which she had set her heart. I don't mind telling you that I'm trying to find some way in which she can chuck the old house down there without losing anything. She wants to give it away, but I won't listen to that. It's worth a hundred thousand if it's worth a nickel. So she closed the place, dismissed the servants and —"

"'Gad, my grandfather wouldn't like that," said Braden. "He was fond of Murray and Wade and —"

"Murray has bought a saloon in Sixth Avenue and talks of going into politics. Old Wade absolutely refused to allow Anne to close up the house. He has received his legacy and turned it over to me for investment. Confound him, when I had him down to the office afterwards he as much as told me that he didn't want to be bothered with the business, and actually complained because I had taken him away from his work at that hour of the day. Anne had to leave him there as caretaker. I understand he is all alone in the house."

"Anne is in Europe, eh? That's good," said Thorpe, more to himself than to his companion.

"Never saw her looking more beautiful than the day she sailed," said Simmy, peering hard in the darkness at

the other's face. "She hasn't had much happiness, Brady."

"Umph!" was the only response, but it was sufficient to turn Simmy off into other channels.

"I suppose you know that George and Lutie are married again."

"Good! I'm glad to hear it," said Thorpe, with enthusiasm.

"Married two weeks after George went to work in that big bank note company's plant. I got the job for him. He starts at the bottom, of course, but that's the right way for a chap like George to begin. He'll have to make good before he can go up an inch in the business. Fifteen a week. But he'll go up, Brady. He'll make good with Lutie to push from behind. Awful blow to Mrs. Tresslyn, however. He's a sort of clerk and has to wear sleeve papers and an eye-shade. I shall never forget the day that Lutie bought him back." Simmy chuckled.

"Bought him back?"

"Yes. She plunked thirty thousand down on the table in my office in front of Mrs. Tresslyn and said 'I sha'n't need a receipt, Mrs. Tresslyn. George is receipt enough for me.' I'd never seen Mrs. Tresslyn blush before, but she blushed then, my boy. Got as red as fire. Then she rose up in her dignity and said she wouldn't take the money. How was her son to live, she said, if Lutie deprived him of his visible means of support? Lutie replied that if George was strong enough to carry the washing back and forth from the customers', she'd manage to support him by taking in dirty linen. Then Mrs. Tresslyn broke down. Damme, Brady, it brought tears to my eyes. You don't know

how affecting it is to see a high and mighty person like Mrs. Tresslyn humble herself like that. She didn't cry. I was the only one who cried, curse me for a silly ass. She just simply said that Lutie was the best and bravest girl in the world and that she was sorry for all that she had done to hurt her. And she asked Lutie to forgive her. Then Lutie put her arm around her and called her an old dear. I didn't see any more on account of the infernal tears. But Lutie wouldn't take back the money. She said that it didn't belong to her and that she couldn't look George in the face if she kept it. So that's how it stands. She and George have a tiny little apartment 'way up town,— three rooms, I believe, and so far she hasn't taken in anybody's washing. Anne wants to refund the money to Lutie, but doesn't know how to go about it. She — er — sort of left it to me to find the way. Lordy, I seem to get all of the tough jobs."

"You are a brick, Simmy," said Thorpe, laying his arm across the little man's shoulders.

"Heigh-ho!" sighed Simmy. Later on, as they returned through the fog that was settling down about them, he inquired: "By the way, will you be ready to start back with me to-morrow?"

"Lord love you, no," cried Thorpe. "I've agreed to help old man Stingley with the boat house. I'll come down in three weeks, Simmy."

"Lordy, Lordy!" groaned Simmy, dejectedly. "Three weeks in this God-forsaken place? I'll die, Brady."

"You? What are you talking about?"

"Why, you don't suppose I'm going back without you, do you?"

CHAPTER XXII

ANNE THORPE remained in Europe for a year, returning to New York shortly before the breaking out of the Great War. She went to the Ritz, where she took an apartment. A day or two after her arrival in the city, she sent for Wade.

"Wade," she said, as the old valet stood smirking before her in the little sitting-room, "I have decided not to re-open the house. I shall never re-open it. I do not intend to live there."

The man turned a sickly green. His voice shook a little. "Are — are you going to close it — for good, — madam?"

"I sent for you this morning to inquire if you are willing to continue living there as caretaker until —"

"You may depend on me, Mrs. Thorpe, to —" he broke in eagerly.

"— until I make up my mind what to do with the property," she concluded.

He hesitated, clearing his throat. "I beg pardon for mentioning it, ma'am, but the will said that you would have to live in the house and that you may not sell it or do anything —"

"I know," she interrupted shortly. "I sha'n't sell the house, of course. On the other hand, I do not intend to live in it. I don't care what becomes of it, Wade."

"It's worth a great deal of money," he ventured.

She was not interested. "But so am I," she said curtly. "By the way, how have you fared, Wade?

You do not look as though you have made the best of your own good fortune. Are you not a trifle thinner?"

The man looked down at the rug. "I am quite well, thank you. A little older, of course,— that's all. I haven't had a sick day in years."

"Why do you stay on in service? You have means of your own,— quite a handy fortune, I should say. I cannot understand your willingness to coop yourself up in that big old house, when you might be out seeing something of life, enjoying your money and — you are a very strange person, Wade."

He favoured her with his twisted smile. "We can't all be alike, madam," he said. "Besides, I couldn't see very much of life with my small pot of gold. I shall always stick to my habit, I suppose, of earning my daily bread."

"I see. Then I may depend upon you to remain in charge of the house? Whenever you are ready to give it up, pray do not hesitate to come to me. I will release you, of course."

"I may possibly live to be ninety," he said, encouragingly.

She stared. "You mean — that you will stay on until you die?"

"Seeing that you cannot legally sell the house,— and you will not live in it,— I hope to be of service to you to the end of my days, madam. Have you considered the possibility of some one setting up a claim to the property on account of your — er — violation of the terms of the will?"

"I should be very happy if some one were to do so, Wade," she replied with a smile. "I should not oppose the claim. Unfortunately there is no one to take the step. There are no disgruntled relatives."

"Ahem! Mr. Braden, of course, might — er — be regarded as a —"

"Dr. Thorpe will not set up a claim, Wade. You need not be disturbed."

"There is no one else, of course," said he, with a deep breath of relief.

"No one. I can't even *give* it away. I shall go on paying taxes on it all my life, I daresay. And repairs and —"

"Repairs won't be necessary, ma'am, unless you have a complaining tenant. I shall manage to keep the place in good order."

"Are your wages satisfactory, Wade?"

"Quite, madam." Sometimes he remembered not to say "ma'am."

"And your food, your own personal comforts, your —"

"Don't worry about me, madam. I make out very well."

"And you are all alone there? All alone in that dark, grim old house? Oh, how terribly lonely it must be. I —" she shivered slightly.

"I have a scrub-woman in twice a month, and Murray comes to see me once in awhile. I read a great deal."

"And your meals?"

"I get my own breakfast, and go down to Sixth Avenue for my luncheons and dinners. There is an excellent little restaurant quite near, you see,— conducted by a very estimable Southern lady in reduced circumstances. Her husband is a Northerner, however, and she doesn't see a great deal of him. I understand he is a person of very uncertain habits. They say he gambles. Her daughter assists her with the business. She

— but, I beg pardon; you would not be interested in them."

"I am glad that you are contented, Wade. We will consider the matter settled, and you will go on as heretofore. You may always find me here, if you desire to communicate with me at any time."

Wade looked around the room. Anne's maid had come in and was employed in restoring a quantity of flowers to the boxes in which they had been delivered. There were roses and violets and orchids in profusion.

Mrs. Thorpe took note of his interest. "You will be interested to hear, Wade, that my sister-in-law is expecting a little baby very soon. I am taking the flowers up to her flat."

"A baby," said Wade softly. "That will be fine, madam."

After Wade's departure, Anne ordered a taxi, and, with the half dozen boxes of flowers piled up in front of her, set out for George's home. On the way up through the park she experienced a strange sense of exaltation, a curious sort of tribute to her own lack of selfishness in the matter of the flowers. This feeling of self-exaltation was so pleasing to her, so full of promise for further demands upon her newly discovered nature, that she found herself wondering why she had allowed herself to be cheated out of so much that was agreeable during all the years of her life! She was now sincerely in earnest in her desire to be kind and gentle and generous toward others. She convinced herself of that in more ways than one. In the first place, she enjoyed thinking first of the comforts of others, and secondly of herself. That in itself was most surprising to her. Up to a year or two ago she would have deprived herself of nothing unless there was some personal satisfaction to

be had from the act, such as the consciousness that the object of her kindness envied her the power to give, or that she could pity herself for having been obliged to give without return. Now she found joy in doing the things she once abhorred,— the unnecessary things, as she had been pleased to describe them.

She loved Lutie,— and that surprised her more than anything else. She did not know it, but she was absorbing strength of purpose, independence, and sincerity from this staunch little woman who was George's wife. She would have cried out against the charge that Lutie had become an Influence! It was all right for Lutie to have an influence on the character of George, but — the thought of anything nearer home than that never entered her head.

As a peculiar — and not especially commendable — example of her present state of unselfishness, she stopped for luncheon with her pretty little sister-in-law, and either forgot or calmly ignored the fact that she had promised Percy Wintermill and his sister to lunch with them at Sherry's. And later on, when Percy complained over the telephone she apologised with perfect humility,— surprising him even more than she surprised herself. She did not, however, feel called upon to explain to him that she had transferred his orchids to Lutie's living-room. That was another proof of her consideration for others. She knew that Percy's feelings would have been hurt.

Lutie was radiantly happy. Her baby was coming in a fortnight.

"You shall have the very best doctor in New York," said Anne, caressing the fair, tousled head. Her own heart was full.

"We're going to have Braden Thorpe," said Lutie.

Anne started. "But he is not — What you want, Lutie, is a specialist. Braden is —"

"He's good enough for me," said Lutie serenely. Possibly she was astonished by the sudden, impulsive kiss that Anne bestowed upon her, and the more fervent embrace that followed.

That afternoon Anne received many callers. Her home-coming meant a great deal to the friends who had lost sight of her during the period of preparation that began, quite naturally, with her marriage to Templeton Thorpe, and was now to bear its results. She would take her place once more in the set to which she belonged as a Tresslyn.

Alas, for the memory of old Templeton Thorpe, her one-time intimates in society were already speaking of her,— absently, of course,— as Anne Tresslyn. The newspapers might continue to allude to her as the beautiful Mrs. Thorpe, but that was as far as it would go. Polite society would not be deceived. It would not deny her the respectability of marriage, to be sure, but on the other hand, it wouldn't think of her as having been married to old Mr. Thorpe. It might occasionally give a thought or two to the money that had once been Mr. Thorpe's, and it might go so far as to pity Anne because she had been stupid or ill-advised in the matter of a much-discussed ante-nuptial arrangement, but nothing could alter the fact that she had never ceased being a Tresslyn, and that there was infinite justice in the restoration of at least one of the Tresslyns to a state of affluence. It remains to be seen whether Society's estimate of her was right or wrong.

Her mother came in for half an hour, and admitted that the baby would be a good thing for poor George.

"I am rather glad it is coming," she said. "I shall

know what to do with that hateful money she forced me to take back."

"What do you mean, mother?"

Mrs. Tresslyn lifted her lorgnon. "Have you forgotten, my dear?"

"Of course I haven't. But what *do* you mean?"

"It is perfectly simple, Anne. I mean that as soon as this baby comes I shall settle the whole of that thirty thousand dollars upon it, and have it off my mind forever. Heaven knows it has plagued me to —"

"You — but, mother, can you afford to do anything so —"

"My dear, it may interest you to know that your mother possesses a great deal of that abomination known as pride. I have not spent so much as a penny of Lutie Car — of my daughter-in-law's money. You look surprised. Have you been thinking so ill of me as that? Did you believe that I —"

Anne threw her arms about her mother's neck, and kissed her rapturously.

"I see you *did* believe it of me," said Mrs. Tresslyn drily. Then she kissed her daughter in return. "I haven't been able to look my daughter-in-law in the face since she virtually threw all that money back into mine. I've been almost distracted trying to think of a way to force it back upon her, so that I might be at peace with myself. This baby will open the way. It will simplify everything. It shall be worth thirty thousand dollars in its own right the day it is born."

Anne was beaming. "And on that same day, mother dear, I will replace the amount that you turn over to —"

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Tresslyn sharply. "I am not doing this thing because I am kind-hearted, affectionate, or even remorseful. I shall do it

because it pleases me, and not for the sake of pleasing any one else. Now we'll drop the subject. I do hope, however, that if George doesn't take the trouble to telephone me within a reasonable time after his child comes into the world — say within a day or two — I hope you will do so."

"Really, mother, you are a very wonderful person," said Anne, rather wide-eyed.

"No more wonderful, my dear, than Lutie Carnahan, if you will pause for a moment to think of what *she* did."

"She is very proud, and very happy," said Anne dubiously. "She and George may refuse to accept this —"

"My dear Anne," interrupted her mother calmly, "pray let me remind you that Lutie is no fool. And now, tell me something about your plans. Where are you going for the summer?"

"That depends entirely on where my nephew wants to spend the heated term," said Anne brightly. "I shall take him and Lutie into the country with me."

Mrs. Tresslyn winced. "It doesn't sound quite so terrible as grandson, at any rate," she remarked, considering the first sentence only.

"I do hope it will be a boy," mused Anne.

"I believe I could love her if she gave us a boy," said the other. "I am beginning to feel that we need more men in the family."

One of the last to drop in during the afternoon to welcome Anne back to the fold was the imposing and more or less redoubtable Mrs. Wintermill, head of the exclusive family to which Percy belonged. Percy's father was still alive but he was a business man, and as such he met his family as he would any other liability: when necessary.

Mrs. Wintermill's first remark after saying that she was glad to see Anne looking so well was obviously the result of a quick and searching glance around the room,

"Isn't Percy here?" she inquired.

Anne had just had an uncomfortable half minute on the telephone with Percy. "Not unless he is hiding behind that couch over there, Mrs. Wintermill," she said airily. "He is coming up later, I believe."

"I was to meet him here," said Mrs. Wintermill, above flippancy. "Is it five o'clock?"

"No," said Anne. Mrs. Wintermill smiled again. She was puzzled a little by the somewhat convulsive gurgle that burst from Anne's lips. "I beg your pardon. I just happened to think of something." She turned away to say good-bye to the last of her remaining visitors,— two middle-aged ladies who had not made her acquaintance until after her marriage to Templeton Thorpe and therefore were not by way of knowing Mrs. Wintermill without the aid of opera-glasses. "Do come and see me again."

"Who are they?" demanded Mrs. Wintermill before the servant had time to close the door behind the departing ones. She did not go to the trouble of speaking in an undertone.

"Old friends of Mr. Thorpe's," said Anne. "Washington Square people. More tea, Ludwig. How well you are looking, Mrs. Wintermill. So good of you to come."

"We wanted to be among the first — if not the very first — to welcome you home, Jane. Percy said to me this morning before he left for the office: 'Mother, you must run in and see Jane Tresslyn to-day.' Ahem! Dear me, I seem to have got into the habit of dropping things every time I move. Thanks, dear. Ahem! As

I was saying, I said to Percy this morning: 'I must run in and see Jane Tresslyn to-day.' And Percy said that he would meet me here and go on to the — Do you remember the Fenns? The Rumsey Fenns?"

"Oh, yes. I've been away only a year, you know, Mrs. Wintermill."

"It seems ages. Well, the Fenns are having something or other for a French woman,— or a man, I'm not quite sure,— who is trying to introduce a new tuberculosis serum over here. I shouldn't be the least bit surprised to see it publicly injected into Mr. Fenn, who, I am told, has everything his wife wants him to have. My daughter was saying only a day or two ago that Rumsey Fenn,— we don't know them very well, of course,— naturally, we wouldn't, you know — er — what was I saying? Ah, yes; Percy declared that the city would be something like itself once more, now that you've come home, Jennie. I beg your pardon; — which is it that you prefer? I've quite forgotten. Jennie or Jane?"

"It doesn't in the least matter, Mrs. Wintermill," said Anne amiably. "There isn't much choice."

"How is your mother?"

"Quite well, thank you. And how is Mr. Wintermill?"

"As I was saying, Mrs. Fenn dances beautifully. Percy,— he's really quite silly about dancing,— Percy says she's the best he knows. I do not pretend to dance all of the new ones myself, but — Did you inquire about Mr. Wintermill? He's doing it, too, as they say in the song. By the way, I should have asked before: how is your mother? I haven't seen her in weeks. Good heavens!" The good lady actually turned pale. "It was your husband who died, wasn't it? Not your —

but, of course, *not*. What a relief. You say she's well?"

"You barely missed her. She was here this afternoon."

"So sorry. It *is* good to have you with us again, Kate. How pretty you are. Do you like the Ritz?"

A bell-boy delivered a huge basket of roses at the door at this juncture. Mrs. Wintermill eyed them sharply as Ludwig paused for instructions. Anne languidly picked up the detached envelope and looked at the card it contained.

"Put it on the piano, Ludwig," she said. "They are from Eddie Townshield," she announced, kindly relieving her visitor's curiosity.

"Really," said Mrs. Wintermill. She sent a very searching glance around the room once more. This time she was not looking for Percy, but for Percy's tribute. She was annoyed with Percy. What did he mean by not sending flowers to Anne Tresslyn? In her anger she got the name right. "Orchids are Percy's favourites, Anne. He never sends anything but orchids. He —"

"He sent me some gorgeous orchids this morning," said Anne.

Mrs. Wintermill looked again, even squinting her eyes. "I suppose they *aren't* very hardy at this time of the year. I've noticed they perish —"

"Oh, these were exceedingly robust," interrupted Anne. "They'll live for days." Her visitor gave it up, sinking back with a faint sigh. "I've had millions of roses and orchids and violets since I landed. Every one has been so nice."

Mrs. Wintermill sat up a little straighter in her chair.

"New York men are rather punctilious about such things," she ventured. It was an inquiry.

"Captain Poindexter, Dickie Fowless, Herb. Vandervelt,— oh, I can't remember all of them. The room looked like Thorley's this morning."

Mrs. Wintermill could not stand it any longer. "What have you done with them, my dear?"

Anne enjoyed being veracious. "I took a whole truckload up to my sister-in-law. She's going to have a baby."

Her visitor stiffened. "I was not aware that you had a sister-in-law. Mr. Thorpe was especially free from relatives."

"Oh, this is George's wife. Dear little Lutie Carnahan, don't you know? She's adorable."

"Oh!" oozed from the other's lips. "I — I think I do recall the fact that George was married while in college. It is very nice of you to share your flowers with her. I loathed them, however, when Percy and Elaine were coming. It must be after five, isn't it?"

"Two minutes after," said Anne.

"I thought so. I wonder what has become of — Oh, by the way, Jane, Percy was saying the other day that Eddie Townshield has really been thrown over by that silly little Egburt girl. He was frightfully gone on her, you know. You wouldn't know her. She came out after you went into retirement. That's rather good, isn't it? Retirement! I must tell that to Percy. He thinks I haven't a grain of humour, my dear. It bores him, I fancy, because he is so witty himself. And heaven knows he doesn't get it from his father. That reminds me, have you heard that Captain Poindexter is about to be dismissed from the army on account of that affair with Mrs. Coles last winter? The govern-

ment is very strict about — Ah, perhaps that is Percy now."

But it was not Percy,— only a boy with a telegram.

"Will you pardon me?" said Anne, and tore open the envelope. "Why, it's from Percy."

"From — dear me, what is it, Anne? Has anything happened —"

"Just a word to say that he will be fifteen or twenty minutes late," said Anne drily.

"He is the most thoughtful boy in — But as I was saying, Herbie Vandervelt's affair with Anita Coles was the talk of the town last winter. Every one says that he will not marry her even though Coles divorces her. How I hate that in men. They are not all that sort, thank God. I suppose the business in connection with the estate has been settled, hasn't it? As I recall it, the will was a very simple one, aside from that ridiculous provision that shocked every one so much. I think you made a great mistake in not contesting it, Annie. Percy says that it wouldn't have stood in any court. By the way, have you seen Braden Thorpe?" She eyed her hostess rather narrowly.

"No," was the reply. "It hasn't been necessary, you know. Mr. Dodge attended to everything. My duties as executrix were trifling. My report, or whatever you call it, was ready months ago."

"And all that money? I mean, the money that went to Braden. What of that?"

"It did not go to Braden, Mrs. Wintermill," said Anne levelly. "It is in trust."

Mrs. Wintermill smiled. "Oh, nothing will come of that," she said. "Percy says that you could bet your boots that Braden would have contested if things had been the other way round."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Anne briefly.

"I hear that he is hanging on in spite of what the world says about him, trying to get a practice. Percy sees him quite frequently. He's really sorry for him. When Percy likes a person nothing in the world can turn him against — why, he would lend him money as long as his own lasted. He —"

"Has Braden borrowed money from Percy?" demanded Anne quickly.

"I did not say that he had, my dear," said the other reprovingly. "I merely said that he would lend it to him in any amount if he asked for it. Of course, Braden would probably go to Simmy Dodge in case of — they are almost inseparable, you know. Simmy has been quite a brick, sticking to him like this. My dear,"— leaning a little closer and lowering her voice on Ludwig's account,—"do you know that the poor fellow didn't have a patient for nearly six months? People wouldn't go near him. I hear that he has been doing better of late. I think it was Percy who said that he had operated successfully on a man who had gall stones. Oh, yes, I quite forgot that Percy says he has twenty-five thousand dollars a year as wages for acting as trustee. I fancy he doesn't hesitate to use it to the best advantage. As long as he has that, I dare say he will not starve or go naked."

Receiving no response from Anne, she took courage and playfully shook her finger at the young woman. "Wasn't there some ridiculous talk of an adolescent engagement a few years ago? How queer nature is! I can't imagine you even being interested in him. So soggy and emotionless, and you so full of life and verve and — Still they say he is completely wrapped up in his profession, such as it is. I've always said that a

"But he will not save the man's life," said Mrs. Wintermill significantly. "I do not believe that Marraville himself expects that." She hesitated for an instant. "It is really dreadful that Braden should have achieved so much notoriety on account of — I *beg* your pardon!"

Anne had arisen and was standing over her visitor in an attitude at once menacing and theatric. The old lady blinked and caught her breath.

"If you are trying to make me believe, Mrs. Wintermill, that Braden would consent to — But, why should I insult him by attempting to defend him when no defence is necessary? I know him well enough to say that he would not operate on James Marraville for all the money in the world unless he believed that there was a chance to pull him through." She spoke rapidly and rather too intensely for Mrs. Wintermill's peace of mind.

"That is just what Percy says," stammered the older woman hastily. "He believes in Braden. He says it's all tommy-rot about Marraville paying him to put him out of his misery. My dear, I don't believe there is a more loyal creature on earth than Percy Wintermill. He —"

Percy was announced at that instant. He came quickly into the room and, failing utterly to see his mother, went up to Anne and inquired what the deuce had happened to prevent her coming to luncheon, and why she didn't have the grace to let him know, and what did she take him for, anyway.

"Elaine and I stood around over there for an hour,— an hour, do you get that? — biting everything but food, and —"

"*I'm* awfully sorry, Percy," said Anne calmly.

"I wouldn't offend Elaine for the world. She's —"

"Elaine? What about me? Elaine took it as a joke, confound her,— but I didn't. Now see here, Anne, old girl, you know I'm not in the habit of being —"

"Here is your mother, Percy," interrupted Anne coldly.

"Hello! You still waiting for me, mother? I say, what do you think Anne's been doing to your angel child? Forgetting that he's on earth, that's all. Now, where were you, Anne, and what's the racket? I'm not in the habit of being —"

"I forgot all about it, Percy," confessed Anne deliberately. She was conscious of a sadly unfeminine longing to see just how Percy's nose *could* look under certain conditions. "I couldn't say that to you over the phone, however,— could I?"

"Anne's sister-in-law is expecting a baby," put in Mrs. Wintermill fatuously. This would never do! Percy ought to know better than to say such things to Anne. What on earth had got into him? Except for the foregoing effort, however, she was quite speechless.

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded Percy, chucking his gloves toward the piano. He faced Anne once more, prepared to insist on full satisfaction. The look in her eyes, however, caused him to refrain from pursuing his tactics. He smiled in a sickly fashion and said, after a moment devoted to reconstruction: "But, never mind, Anne; I was only having a little fun bullying you. That's a man's privilege, don't you know. We'll try it again to-morrow, if you say so."

"I have an engagement," said Anne briefly. The next instant she smiled. "Next week perhaps, if you will allow me the privilege of forgetting again."

"Oh, I say!" said Percy, blinking his eyes. How

was he to take that sort of talk? He didn't know. And for fear that he might say the wrong thing if he attempted to respond to her humour, he turned to his mother and remarked: "Don't wait for me, mother. Run along, do. I'm going to stop for a chat with Anne."

As Mrs. Wintermill went out she met Simmy Dodge in the hall.

"Would you mind, Simmy dear, coming down to the automobile with me?" she said quickly. "I—I think I feel a bit faint."

"I'll drive home with you, if you like," said the good Simmy, solicitously.

CHAPTER XXIII

SHE saw by the evening papers that the operation on Marraville was to take place the next day. That night she slept but little. When her maid roused her from the slumber that came long after the sun was up, she immediately called for the morning papers. In her heart she was hoping, almost praying that they would report the death of James Marraville during the night. Then, as she read with burning eyes, she found herself hoping against hope that the old man would, at the last moment, refuse to undergo the operation, or that some member of his family would protest. But even as she hoped, she knew that there would be no objection on the part of either Marraville or his children. He was an old man, he was fatally ill, he was through with life. There would be no obstacle placed in the way of Death. His time had come and there was no one to ask for a respite. He would die under the knife and every one would be convinced that it was for the best. As she sat up in bed, staring before her with bleak, unseeing eyes, she had an inward vision of this rich man's family counting in advance the profits of the day's business! Braden Thorpe was to be the only victim. He was to be the one to suffer. Two big tears grew in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. She had never loved Braden Thorpe as she loved him now.

She knew that he was moved by honest intentions. That he confidently believed he could preserve this man's life she would not for an instant doubt. But why had he agreed to undertake the feat that other men had declared

was useless, the work that other men had said to be absolutely unnecessary? A faint ray of comfort rested on the possibility that these great surgeons, appreciating the widespread interest that naturally would attend the fate of so great a man as James Marraville, were loth to face certain failure, but even that comfort was destroyed by an intelligence that argued for these surgeons instead of against them. They had said that the case was hopeless. They were honest men. They had the courage to say: "This man must die. It is God's work, not ours," and had turned away. They were big men; they would not operate just for the sake of operating. And when they admitted that it was useless they were convincing the world that they were honourable men. Therefore,— she almost ground her pretty teeth at the thought of it,— old Marraville and his family had turned to Braden Thorpe as one without honour or conscience!

She had never been entirely free from the notion that her husband's death was the result of premeditated action on the part of his grandson, but in that instance there was more than professional zeal in the heart of the surgeon: there was love and pity and gentleness in the heart of Braden Thorpe when he obeyed the command of the dying man. If he were to come to her now, or at any time, with the confession that he had deliberately ended the suffering of the man he loved, she would have put her hand in his and looked him in the eye while she spoke her words of commendation. Templeton Thorpe had the right to appeal to him in his hour of hopelessness, but this other man — this mighty Marraville! — what right had he to demand the sacrifice? She had witnessed the suffering of Templeton Thorpe, *she* had prayed for death to relieve him; he had called

upon her to be merciful, and she had denied him. She wondered if James Marraville had turned to those nearest and dearest to him with the cry for mercy. She wondered if the little pellets had been left at his bedside. She knew the extent of his agony, and yet she had no pity for him. He was not asking for mercy at the hands of a man who loved him and who could not deny him. He was demanding something for which he was willing to pay, not with love and gratitude, but with money. Would he look up into Braden's eyes and say, "God bless you," when the end was at hand?

Moved by a sudden irresistible impulse she flung reserve aside and decided to make an appeal to Braden. She would go to him and plead with him to spare himself instead of this rich old man. She would go down on her knees to him, she would humble and humiliate herself, she would cry out her unwanted love to him. . . .

At nine o'clock she was at his office. He was gone for the day, the little placard on the door informed her. Gone for the day! In her desperation she called Simmy Dodge on the telephone. He would tell her what to do. But Simmy's man told her that his master had just gone away in the motor with Dr. Thorpe,— for a long ride into the country. Scarcely knowing what she did she hurried on to Lutie's apartment, far uptown.

"What on earth is the matter, Anne?" cried the gay little wife as her sister-in-law stalked into the tiny drawing-room and threw herself dejectedly upon a couch. Lutie was properly alarmed and sympathetic.

It was what Anne needed. She unburdened herself.

"But," said Lutie cheerfully, "supposing he should save the old codger's life, what then? Why do you look at the black side of the thing? While there's life, there's hope. You don't imagine for an instant that Dr.

Thorpe is going into this big job with an idea of losing his patient, do you?"

Anne's eyes brightened. A wave of relief surged into her heart.

"Oh, Lutie, Lutie, do you really believe that Braden thinks he can save him?"

Lutie's eyes opened very wide. "What in heaven's name are you saying? You don't suppose he's thinking of anything else, do you?" A queer, sinking sensation assailed her suddenly. She remembered. She knew what was in Anne's mind. "Oh, I see! You —" she checked the words in time. An instant later her ready tongue saved the situation. "You don't seem to understand what a golden opportunity this is for Braden. Here is a case that every newspaper in the country is talking about. It's the chance of a lifetime. He'll do his best, let me tell you that. If Mr. Marraville dies, it won't be Braden's fault. You see, he's just beginning to build up a practice. He's had a few unimportant cases and he's — well, he's just beginning to realise that pluck and perseverance will do 'most anything for a fellow. Now, here comes James Marraville, willing to take a chance with him — because it's the only chance left, I'll admit,— and you can bet your last dollar, Anne, that Braden isn't going to make a philanthropic job of it."

"But if he fails, Lutie,— if he fails don't you see what the papers will say? They will crush him to —"

"Why should they? Bigger men than he have failed, haven't they?"

"But it will ruin Braden forever. It will be the end of all his hopes, all his ambitions. *This* will convict him as no other —"

"Now, don't get excited, dear," cautioned the other

gently. "You're working yourself into an awful state. I think I understand, Anne. You poor old girl!"

"I want you to know, Lutie. I want some one to know what he is to me, in spite of everything."

Then Lutie sat down beside her and, after deliberately pulling the pins from her visitor's hat, tossed it aimlessly in the direction of a near-by chair,— failing to hit it by several feet,— and drew the smooth, troubled head down upon her shoulder.

"Stay and have luncheon with George and me," she said, after a half hour of confidences. "It will do you good. I'll not breathe a word of what you've said to me,— not even to old George. He's getting so nervous nowadays that he comes home to lunch and telephones three or four times a day. It's an awful strain on him. He doesn't eat a thing, poor dear. I'm really quite worried about him. Take a little snooze here on the sofa, Anne. You must be worn out. I'll cover you up —"

The door-bell rang.

Lutie started and her jaw fell. "Good gracious! That's — that's Dr. Thorpe now. He is the only one who comes up without being announced from downstairs. Oh, dear! What shall I — Don't you think you'd better see him, Anne?"

Anne had arisen. A warm flush had come into her pale cheeks. She was breathing quickly and her eyes were bright.

"I will see him, Lutie. Would you mind leaving us alone together for a while? I must make sure of one thing. Then I'll be satisfied."

Lutie regarded her keenly for a moment. "Just remember that you can't afford to make a fool of yourself," she said curtly, and went to the door. A most

extraordinary thought entered Anne's mind, a distinct thought among many that were confused: Lutie ought to have a parlour-maid, and she would make it her business to see that she had one at once. Poor, plucky little thing! And then the door was opened and Thorpe walked into the room.

"Well, how are we this morning?" he inquired cheerily, clasping Lutie's hand. "Fine, I see. I happened to be passing with Simmy and thought I'd run in and see —" His gaze fell upon the tall, motionless figure on the opposite side of the room, and the words died on his lips.

"It's Anne," said Lutie fatuously.

For a moment there was not a sound or a movement in the little room. The man was staring over Lutie's head at the slim, elegant figure in the modish spring gown,— it was something smart and trig, he knew, and it was not black. Then he advanced with his hand extended.

"I am glad to see you back, Anne. I heard you had returned." Their hands met in a brief clasp. His face was grave, and a queer pallor had taken the place of the warm glow of an instant before.

"Three days ago," she said, and that was all. Her throat was tight and dry. He had not taken his eyes from hers. She felt them burning into her own, and somehow it hurt,— she knew not why.

"Well, it's good to see you," he mumbled, finding no other words. He pulled himself together with an effort. He had not expected to see her here. He had dreamed of her during the night just past. "Simmy is waiting down below in the car. I just dropped in for a moment. Can't keep him waiting, Lutie, so I'll —"

"Won't you spare me a few moments, Braden?" said

Anne steadily. "There is something that I must say to you. To-morrow will not do. It must be now."

He looked concerned. "Has anything serious —"

"Nothing — yet," she broke in, anticipating his question.

"Sit down, Braden," said Lutie cheerfully. "I'll make myself scarce. I see you are down for a big job to-day. Good boy! I told you they'd come your way if you waited long enough. It is a big job, isn't it?"

"Ra-*ther*," said he, smiling. "I daresay it will make or break me."

"I should think you'd be frightfully nervous."

"Well, I'm not, strange to say. On the contrary, I'm as fit as a fiddle."

"When do you — perform this operation?" Anne asked, as Lutie left the room.

"This afternoon. He has a superstition about it. Doesn't want it done until after banking hours. Queerest idea I've ever known." He spoke in quick, jerky sentences.

She held her breath for an instant, and then cried out imploringly: "I don't want you to do it, Braden,— I don't want you to do it. If not for my sake, then for your own you must refuse to go on with it."

He looked straight into her troubled, frightened eyes. "I suppose you are like the rest of them: you think I'm going to kill him, eh?" His voice was low and bitter.

She winced, half closing her eyes as if a blow had been aimed at them. "Oh, don't say that! How horrible it sounds when you — *speak it*."

He could see that she was trembling, and suddenly experienced an odd feeling of contentment. He had seen it in her eyes once more: the love that had never faltered although dragged in the dirt, discredited and betrayed.

She still loved him, and he was glad to know it. He could gloat over it.

"I am not afraid to speak it, as you say," he said curtly. Then he pitied her. "I'm sorry, Anne. I shouldn't have said it. I think I understand what you mean. It's good of you to care. But I am going ahead with it, just the same." His jaw was set in the old, resolute way.

"Do you know what they will say if you — fail?" Her voice was husky.

"Yes, I know. I also know why they finally came to me. They haven't any hope. They believe that I may — well, at least I will not say *that*, Anne. Down in their hearts they all hope,— but it isn't the kind of hope that usually precedes an operation. No one has dared to suggest to me that I put him out of his misery, but that's what they're expecting,— all of them. But they are going to be disappointed. I do not owe anything to James Marraville. He is nothing to me. I do not love him as I loved my grandfather."

He spoke slowly, with grave deliberation; there was not the slightest doubt that he intended her to accept this veiled explanation of his present attitude as a confession that he had taken his grandfather's life.

She was silent. She understood. He went on, more hurriedly:

"I can only say to you, Anne, that my grandfather might have gone on living for a few weeks or even months. Well, there is no reason why Marraville shouldn't go on living for awhile. Do you see what I mean? He shall not die to-day if I can help it. He will hang on for weeks, not permanently relieved but at least comforted in the belief that his case isn't hopeless. I shall do my best." He smiled sardonically.

"The operation will be called a success, and he will merely go on dying instead of having it all over with."

She closed her eyes. "Oh, how cruel it is," she murmured. "How cruel it is, after all."

"He will curse me for failing to do my duty," said he grimly. "The world will probably say that I am a benefactor to the human race, after all, and I will be called a great man because I allow him a few more weeks of agony. I may fail, of course. He may not survive the day. But no one will be justified in saying that I did not do my best to tide him over for a few weeks or months. And what a travesty it will be if I do succeed! Every one except James Marraville will praise me to the skies. My job will be done, but he will have it all to do over again,— this business of dying."

She held out her hand. Her eyes had filled with tears.

"God be with you, Braden." He took her hand in his, and for a moment looked into the swimming eyes.

"You understand *everything* now, don't you, Anne?" he inquired. His face was very white and serious. He released her hand.

"Yes," she answered; "I understand everything. I am glad that you have told me. It — it makes no difference; I want you to understand that, Braden."

It seemed to her that he would never speak. He was regarding her thoughtfully, evidently weighing his next words with great care.

"Three doctors know," he said at last. "They must never find out that you know."

Her eyes flashed through the tears. "I am not afraid to have the world know," she said quickly.

He shook his head, smiling sadly.

"But I am," he said. It was a long time before she grasped the full significance of this surprising admission.

When, hours afterward, she came to realise all that it meant she knew that he was not thinking of himself when he said that he was afraid. He was thinking of her; he had thought of her from the first. Now she could only look puzzled and incredulous. It was not like him to be afraid of consequences.

"If you are afraid," she demanded quickly, "why do you invite peril this afternoon? The chances are against you, Braden. Give it up. Tell them you cannot —"

"This afternoon?" he broke in, rather violently. "Good God, Anne, I'm not afraid of what is going to happen this afternoon. Marraville isn't going to die to-day, poor wretch. I can't afford to let him die." He almost snarled the words. "I have told these people that if I fail to take him through this business to-day, I'll accept no pay. That is understood. The newspapers will be so informed in case of failure. You are shocked. Well, it isn't as bad as it sounds. I am in deadly earnest in this matter. It is my one great chance. It means more to me to save James Marraville's life than it means to him. I'm sorry for him, but he has to go on living, just the same. Thank you for being interested. Don't worry about it. I —"

"The evening papers will tell me how it turns out," she said dully. "I shall pray for you, Braden."

He turned on her savagely. "Don't do that!" he almost shouted. "I don't want your support. I —" Other words surged to his lips but he held them back. She drew back as if he had struck her a blow in the face. "I — I beg your pardon," he muttered, and then strode across the room to thump violently on the door to Lutie's bed-chamber. "Come out! I'm going. Can't keep the nation waiting, you know."

Two minutes later Anne and Lutie were alone. The former, inwardly shaken despite an outward appearance of composure, declined to remain for luncheon, as she had done the day before. Her interest in Lutie and her affairs was lost in the contemplation of a reviving sense of self-gratification, long dormant but never quite unconscious. She had recovered almost instantly from the shock produced by his violent command, and where dismay had been there was now a warm, grateful rush of exultation. She suspected the meaning of that sudden, fierce lapse into rudeness. Her heart throbbed painfully, but with joyous relief. It was not rudeness on his part; on the contrary he was paying tribute to her. He was dismayed by the feelings he found himself unable to conquer. The outburst was the result of a swift realisation that she still had the power to move him in spite of all his mighty resolves, in spite even of the contempt he had for her.

She walked to the Ritz. It was a long distance from George's home, but she went about it gladly in preference to the hurried, pent-up journey down by taxi or stage. She wanted to be free and unhampered. She wanted to think, to analyse, to speculate on what would happen next. For the present she was content to glory in the fact that he had unwittingly betrayed himself.

She was near the Plaza before the one great, insurmountable obstacle arose in her mind to confound her joyous calculations. What would it all come to, after all? She could never be more to him than she was at this instant, for between them lay the truth about the death of Templeton Thorpe,— and Templeton Thorpe was her husband. Her exaltation was short-lived. The joy went out of her soul. The future looked to be even more barren than before the kindly hope sprang up to

wave its golden prospects before her deluded eyes.

He would never look at the situation from her point of view. Even though he found himself powerless to resist the love that was regaining strength enough to batter down the wall of prejudice her marriage had created in his mind, there would still stand between them his conviction that it would be an act of vileness to claim or even covet the wife of the man whose life he had taken, not in anger or reprisal but in honest devotion.

Anne was not callous or unfeeling in her readiness to disregard what he might be expected to call the ethics of the case. She very sensibly looked at the question as one in which the conscience had no part, for the simple reason that there was no guilty motive to harass it. If his conscience was clear,— and it most certainly was, — there could be no sound reason for him to deny himself the right to reclaim that which belonged to him by all the laws of nature. On her part there was not the slightest feeling of revulsion. She did not look upon his act as a barrier. Her own act in betraying him was far more of a barrier than this simple thing that he had done. She had believed it to be insurmountable. She had long ago accepted as final the belief that he despised her and would go on doing so to the end. And now, in the last hour, there had been a revelation. He still loved her. His scorn, his contempt, his disgust were not equal to the task of subduing the emotion that lived in spite of all of them. But this other thing! This thing that he would call *decency!*

All through the afternoon his savage, discordant cry: "Don't do that!" rang in her ears. She thrilled and crumpled in turn. The blood ran hot once more in her veins. As she looked back over the past year it seemed to her that her blood had been cold and sluggish. But

now it was warm again and tingling. Even the desolating thought that her discovery would yield no profit failed to check the riotous, grateful warmth that raced through her body from crown to toe. Despair had its innings, but there was always compensation in the return of a joy that would not acknowledge itself beaten. Joy enough to feel that he could not help loving her! Joy to feel that he was hungry too! No matter what happened now she would know that she had not lost all of him.

After a while she found herself actually enjoying the prospect of certain failure on Braden's part in the case of Marraville. Reviled and excoriated beyond endurance, he would take refuge in the haven that she alone could open to him. He would come to her and she would go with him, freely and gladly, into new places where he could start all over again and — But even as she conjured up this sacrificial picture, this false plaisance, her cheeks grew hot with shame. The real good that was in Anne Tresslyn leaped into revolt. She hated herself for the thought; she could have cursed herself. What manner of love was this that could think of self alone? What of him? What of the man she loved?

She denied herself to callers. At half-past five she called up the hospital and inquired how Mr. Marraville was getting along. She had a horrid feeling that the voice at the other end would say that he was dead. She found a vast relief in the polite but customary "doing very nicely" reply that came languidly over the wires. Anne was not by way of knowing that the telephone operators in the hospitals would say very cheerfully that "Mr. Washington is doing very nicely," if one were to call up to inquire into the condition of the Father of his Country! An "extra" at six o'clock announced

that the operation had taken place and that Mr. Marraville had survived it, although it was too soon to,— and so on and so forth.

Then she called Simmy Dodge up on the telephone. Simmy would know if anybody knew. And with her customary cleverness and foresightedness she called him up at the hospital.

After a long delay Simmy's cheery voice came singing — or rather it was barking — into her ear. This had been the greatest day in the life of Simeon Dodge. From early morn he had gone about in a state of optimistic unrest. He was more excited than he had ever been in his life before,— and yet he was beatifically serene. His brow was unclouded, his eyes sparkled and his voice rang with all the confidence of extreme felicity. There was no question in Simmy's mind as to the outcome. Braden would pull the old gentleman through, sure as anything. Absolutely sure, that's what Simmy was, and he told other people so.

"Fine as silk!" he shouted back in answer to Anne's low, suppressed inquiry. "Never anything like it, Anne, old girl. One of the young doctors told me —"

"Has he come out of the ether, Simmy?"

"What say?"

"Is he conscious? Has the ether —"

"I can't say as to that," said Simmy cheerfully. "He's been back in his room since five o'clock. That's — let's see what time is it now? Six-fourteen. Nearly an hour and a quarter. They all say —"

"Have you see Braden?"

"Sure. He's fagged out, poor chap. Strain something awful. Good Lord, I wonder what it must have been to him when it came so precious near to putting me out of business. I thought I was dying at half-past

four. I never expected to live to see Mr. Marraville out of the operating-room. Had to take something for medicinal purposes. I knew all along that Braden could do the job like a —"

"Where is he now?"

"Last I heard of him he was back in his room with the house doctor and —"

"I mean Braden."

"What are you sore about, Anne?" complained Simmy. Her voice had sounded rather querulous to him. "I thought you meant the patient. Brady is up there, too, I guess. Sh! I can't say anything more. A lot of reporters are coming this way."

The morning papers announced that James Marraville had passed a comfortable night and that not only Dr. Thorpe but other physicians who were attending him expressed the confident opinion that if he continued to gain throughout the day and if nothing unforeseen occurred there was no reason why he should not recover. He had rallied from the anæsthetic, his heart was good, and there was no temperature. Members of the family were extremely hopeful. His two sons-in-law — who were spokesmen for the other members of the family — were united in the opinion that Dr. Thorpe had performed a miracle. Dr. Thorpe, himself, declined to be interviewed. He referred the newspaper men to the other surgeons and physicians who were interested in the case.

There was an underlying note of dismay, rather deftly obscured, in all of the newspaper accounts, however. Not one of them appeared to have recovered from the surprise that had thrown all of their plans out of order. They had counted on James Marraville's death and had prepared themselves accordingly. There were leading

editorials in every office, and columns of obituary matter; and there were far from vague allusions to the young doctor who performed the operation. And here was the man alive! It was really more shocking than if he had died, as he was expected to do. It is no wonder, therefore, that the first accounts were almost entirely without mention of the doctor who had upset all of their calculations. He hadn't lived up to the requirements. The worst of it all was that Mr. Marraville's failure to expire on the operating table forever deprived them of the privilege of saying, invidiously, that young Doctor Thorpe had been called in as the last resort. It would take them a day or two, no doubt, to adjust themselves to the new situation, and then, if the millionaire was still showing signs of surviving, they would burst forth into praise of the marvellous young surgeon who had startled the entire world by his performance!

In the meantime, there was still a chance that Mr. Marraville might die, so it was better to hesitate and be on the safe side.

CHAPTER XXIV

JAMES MARRAVILLE called Thorpe a coward and a poltroon. This was a week after the operation. They were alone in the room. For days his wondering, questioning eyes had sought those of the man on whom he had depended for everlasting peace, and always there had been a look of reproach in them. Not in words, but still plainly, he was asking why he still lived, why this man had not done the thing that was expected of him. Every one about him was talking of the marvellous, incredible result of the operation; every one was looking cheerful and saying that he would "soon be as good as new." And all the while he was lying there, weak and beaten, wondering why they lied to him, and why Man as well as God had been so cruel to him. He was not deceived. He knew that he had it all to live over again. He knew what they meant when they said that it had been very successful! And so, one day, in all the bitterness of his soul, he cursed the man who had given him a few more months to live.

But there were other men and women who did not want to die. They wanted very dearly to live, and they had been afraid to risk an operation. Now that the world was tumbling over itself to proclaim the greatness of the surgeon who had saved James Marraville's life, the faint-hearted of all degrees flowed in a stream up to his doors and implored him to name his own price. . . . So goes the world. . . .

The other doctors knew, and Braden knew, and most thoroughly of all James Marraville knew, that while the

operation was a wonderful feat in surgery, it might just as well have remained undone. The young doctor simply had done all that was in the power of man to do for a fellow creature. He had cheated Death out of an easy victory, but Death would come again and sit down beside James Marraville to wait for another day.

Down near Washington Square, Wade blinked his eyes and shook his head, and always re-read the reports from the sick-room. He was puzzled and sometimes there was a faraway look in his eyes.

. . . . . .

Lutie's baby came. He came long after midnight, and if he had been given the power at birth to take intelligent notice of things, he would have been vastly astonished to hear that his grandmother had been sitting up in an adjoining room with her son and daughter, anxiously, even fearfully, awaiting his advent into the world. And he would have been further astonished and perhaps distressed if any one had told him that his granny cried a little over him, and refused to go to her own home until she was quite sure that his little mother was all right. Moreover, he would have been gravely impressed by the presence of the celebrated Dr. Thorpe, and the extraordinary agony of that great big tall man who cowered and shivered and who wouldn't even look at him because he had eyes and thought for no one but the little mother. Older and wiser persons would have revealed considerable interest in the certificate of deposit that his grandmother laid on the bed beside him. He was quite a rich little boy without knowing it. Thirty thousand dollars is not to be sneezed at, and it would be highly unjust to say that it was a sneeze that sent his grandmother, his aunt and his father into hysterics of alarm.

They called him Carnahan Tresslyn. He represented a distinct phase in the regeneration of a proud and haughty family.

A few weeks later Anne took a house up among the hills of Westchester County, and moved Lutie and the baby out into the country. It did not occur to her to think that she was making a personal sacrifice in going up there to spend the hot months.

Percy Wintermill informed her one day that he was going to ask her to marry him when the proper time arrived. It would be the third time, he reminded her. He was being forehanded, that was all,— declaring himself in advance of all others and thereby securing, as he put it, the privilege of priority. She was not very much moved by the preparation of Percy. In fact, she treated the matter with considerable impatience.

"Really, you know, Percy," she said, "I'm getting rather fed up with refusing you. I'm sure I've done it more than three times. Why don't you ask some girl who will have you?"

"That's just the point," said he frankly. "If I asked some girl who would have me, she'd take me, and then where would you come in? I don't want any one but you, Anne, and —"

"Sorry, Perce, but it's no use," said she briefly.

"Well, I haven't asked you yet," he reminded her. After some minutes, spent by him in rumination and by her in wondering why she didn't send him away, he inquired, quite casually: "Anybody else in mind, old girl?" She merely stared at him. "Hope it isn't Brady Thorpe," he went on. "He's one of my best friends. I'd hate to think that I'd have to —"

"Go home, Percy," she said. "I'm going out,— and I'm late already. Thanks for the orchids. Don't

bother to send any more. It's just a waste of money, old fellow. I sha'n't marry you. I sha'n't marry any one except the man with whom I fall desperately, horribly in love,— and I'm not going to fall in love with you, so run away."

"You weren't in love with old man Thorpe, were you?" he demanded, flushing angrily.

"I haven't the right to be offended by that beastly remark, Percy," she said quietly; "and yet I don't think you ought to have said it to me."

"It was meant only to remind you that it won't be necessary for you to fall desperately, horribly in love with me," he explained, and was suddenly conscious of being very uncomfortable for the first time in his life. He did not like the expression in her eyes.

Her shoulders drooped a little. "It isn't very comforting to feel that any one of my would-be husbands could be satisfied to get along without being loved by me. No doubt I shall be asked by others besides you, Percy. I hope you do not voice the sentiments of all the rest of them."

"I'm sorry I said it," he said, and seemed a little bewildered immediately afterwards. He really couldn't make himself out. He went away a few minutes later, vaguely convinced that perhaps it wouldn't be worth while to ask her, after all. This was a new, strange Anne, and it would hurt to be refused by her. He had never thought of it in just that way — before.

"So that is the price they put upon me, is it?" Anne said to herself. She was regarding herself rather humbly in the mirror as she pinned on her hat. "I am still expected to marry without loving the man who takes me. It isn't to be exacted of me. Don't they credit me with a capacity for loving? What do they think I

am? What do they think my blood is made of, and the flesh on my bones? Do they think that because I am beautiful I can love no one but myself? Don't they think I'm human? How can any one look at me without feeling that I'd rather love than be loved? The poor fools! Any woman can be loved. What we all want more than anything else is to *love*. And I love — I *do* love! And I *am* beloved. And all the rest of my life I shall love; I shall gloat over the fact that I love; I shall love, love, *love* with all that there is in me, all that there is in my body and my soul. The poor fools."

And all that was in her body and her soul was prepared to give itself to the man who loved her. She wanted him to have her for his own. She pitied him even more than she pitied herself.

Anne had no illusions concerning herself. Mawkish sentimentality had no place in her character. She was straightforward and above board with herself, and she would not cheapen herself in her own eyes. Another woman might have gone down on her knees, whimpering a cry for forgiveness, but not Anne Tresslyn. She would ask him to forgive her but she would not lie to herself by prostrating her body at his feet. There was firm, noble stuff in Anne Tresslyn. It was born in her to know that the woman who goes down on her knees before her man never quite rises to her full height again. She will always be in the position of wondering whether she stayed on her knees long enough to please him. The thought had never entered Anne's head to look anywhere but straight into Braden's eyes. She was not afraid to have him see that she was honest! He could see that she had no lies to tell him. And she was as sorry for him as she was for herself. . . .

She saw him often during the days of Lutie's con-

valescence, but never alone. There was considerable comfort for her in the thought that he made a distinct point of not being alone with her. One day she said to him:

"I have my car outside, Braden. Shall I run you over to St. Luke's?"

It was a test. She knew that he was going to the hospital, and intended to take the elevated down to 110th Street. His smile puzzled her.

"No, thank you." Then, after a moment, he added: "If people saw me driving about in a prosperous looking touring-car they'd be justified in thinking that my fees are exorbitant, and I should lose more than I'd gain."

She flushed slightly. "By the same argument they might think you were picking up germs in the elevated or the subway."

"I shun the subway," he said.

Anne looked straight into his eyes and said — to herself: "I love you." He must have sensed the unspoken words, for his eyes hardened.

"Moreover, Anne, I shouldn't think it would be necessary for me to remind you that —" he hesitated, for he suddenly realised that he was about to hurt her, and it was not what he wanted to do —"that there are other and better reasons why —"

He stopped there, and never completed the sentence. She was still looking into his eyes and was still saying to herself: "I love you." It was as if a gentle current of electricity played upon every nerve in his body. He quivered under the touch of something sweet and mysterious. Exaltation was his response to the magnetic wave that carried her unspoken words into his heart. She had not uttered a sound and yet he heard

the words. How many times had she cried those delicious words into his ear while he held her close in his arms? How many times had she looked at him like this while actually speaking the words aloud in answer to his appeal?

They were standing but a few feet apart. He could take a step forward and she would be in his arms,— that glorious, adorable, ineffably feminine creation,— in his arms,— in his arms,—

It was she who broke the spell. Her voice sounded far off — and exhausted, as if it came from her lips without breath behind it.

"It will always be just the same, Braden," she said, and he knew that it was an acknowledgment of his unfinished reminder. She was promising him something.

He took a firm grip on himself. "I'm glad that you see things as they are, Anne. Now, I must be off. Thanks just the same for —"

"Oh, don't mention it," she said carelessly. "I'm glad that you see things too as they are, Braden." She held out her hand. There was no restraint in her manner. "I'm sorry, Braden. Things might have been so different. I'm sorry."

"Good God!" he burst out. "If you had only been —" He broke off, resolutely compressing his lips. His jaw was set again in the strong old way that she knew so well.

She nodded her head slowly. "If I had only been some one else instead of myself," she said, "it would not have happened."

He turned toward the door, stopped short and then turned to face her. There was a strange expression in his grey eyes, not unlike diffidence.

"Percy told me last night that you have refused to

marry him. I'm glad that you did that, Anne. I want you to know that I am glad, that I felt — oh, I cannot tell you how I felt when he told me."

She eyed him closely for a moment. "You thought that I — I might have accepted him. Is that it?"

"I — I hadn't thought of it at all," he said, confusedly.

"Well," she said, and a slight pallor began to reveal itself in her face, "I tried marrying for money once, Braden. The next time I shall try marrying for love."

He stared. "You don't mince words, do you?" he said, frowning.

"No," she said. "Percy will tell you that, I fancy," she added, and smiled. "He can't understand my not marrying him. He will be worth fifteen or twenty millions, you know." The irony in her voice was directed inwardly, not outwardly. "Perhaps it would be safer for him to wait before taking too much for granted. You see, I haven't actually refused him. I merely refused to give him an option. He —"

"Oh, Anne, don't jest about —" he began, and then as her eyes fell suddenly under his gaze and her lip trembled ever so slightly,—"By Jove, I — I sha'n't misjudge you in that way again. Good-bye." This time he held out his hand to her.

She shook her head. "I've changed my mind. I'm never going to say good-bye to you again."

"Never say good-bye? Why, that's —"

"Why should I say good-bye to you when you are always with me?" she broke in. Noting the expression in his eyes she went on ruthlessly, breathlessly. "Do you think I ought to be ashamed to say such a thing to you? Well, I'm not. It doesn't hurt my pride to say it. Not in the least." She paused for an instant and

then went on boldly. "I fancy I am more honest with myself than you are with yourself, Braden."

He looked steadily into her eyes. "You are wrong there," he said quietly. Then bluntly: "By God, Anne, if it were not for the one terrible thing that lies between us, I could — I could —"

"Go on," she said, her heart standing still. "You can at least *say* it to me. I don't ask for anything more."

"But why say it?" he cried out bitterly. "Will it help matters in the least for me to confess that I am weak and —"

She laughed aloud, unable to resist the nervous excitement that thrilled her. "Weak? You weak? Look back and see if you can find a single thing to prove that you are weak. You needn't be afraid. You are strong enough to keep me in my place. You cannot put yourself in jeopardy by completing what you started out to say. 'If it were not for the one terrible thing that lies between us, I could — I could —' Well, what could you do? Overlook my treachery? Forget that I did an even more terrible thing than you did? Forgive me and take me back and trust me all over again? Is that what you would have said to me?"

"That is what I might have said," he admitted, almost savagely, "if I had not come to my senses in time."

Her eyes softened. The love-light glowed in their depths. "I am not as I was two years ago, Braden," she said. "I'd like you to know that, at least."

"I dare say that is quite true," he said harshly. "You got what you went after and now that you've got it you can very comfortably repent."

She winced. "I am not repenting."

"Would you be willing to give up all that you gained out of that transaction and go back to where my grandfather found you?" he demanded?

"Do you expect me to lie to you?" she asked with startling candour.

"No. I know you will not lie."

"Would it please you to have me say that I would willingly give up all that I gained?"

"I see what you mean. It would be a lie."

"Would it please you to have me give it all up?" she insisted.

He was thoughtful. "No," he said candidly. "You earned it, you are entitled to it. It is filthy, dirty money, but you earned it. You do not deny that it was your price. That's the long and the short of it."

"Will you let me confess something to you? Something that will make it all seem more despicable than before?"

"Good Lord, I don't see how that can be possible!"

"I did not expect to lose you, Braden, when I married Mr. Thorpe. I counted on you in the end. I was so sure of myself,— and of you. Wait! Let me finish. If I had dreamed that I was to lose you, I should not have married Mr. Thorpe. That makes it worse, doesn't it?" There was a note of appeal in her voice.

"Yes, yes,— it makes it worse," he groaned.

"I was young and — over-confident," she murmured. "I looked ahead to the day when I should be free again and you would be added to the — well, the gains. Now you know the whole truth about me. I was counting on you, looking forward to you, even as I stood beside him and took the vows. You were always uppermost in my calculations. I never left you out of them. Even to this day, to this very moment, I continue to count on

you. I shall never be able to put the hope out of my mind. I have tried it and failed. You may despise me if you will, but nothing can kill this mean little thing that lurks in here. I don't know what you will call it, Braden, but I call it loyalty to you."

"Loyalty! My God!" he cried out hoarsely.

"Yes, loyalty," she cried. "Mean as I am, mean as I have been, I have never wavered an instant in my love for you. Oh, I'm not pleading for anything. I'm not begging. I don't ask for anything,— not even your good opinion. I am only telling you the truth. Mr. Thorpe knew it all. He knew that I loved you, and he knew that I counted on having you after he was out of the way. And here is something else that you never knew, or suspected. He believed that my love for you, my eagerness, my longing to be free to call you back again, would be the means of releasing him from the thing that was killing him. He counted on me to — I will put it as gently as I can — to free myself. I believe in my soul that he married me with that awful idea in his mind."

For a long time they were silent. Braden was staring at her, horror in his eyes. She remained standing before him, motionless. Lutie's nurse passed through the little hall outside, but they did not see or hear her. A door closed softly; the faint crying of the baby went unheard.

"You are wrong there," he said at last, thickly. "I happen to know what his motives were, Anne."

"Oh, I know," she said wearily. "To prove to you how utterly worthless I am,— or was. Well, it may have been that. I hope it was. I would like to think it of him instead of the other thing. I would like to think of him as sacrificing himself for your sake, instead of

planning to sacrifice me for his sake. It is a terrible thought, Braden. He begged me to give him those tablets, time and again. I — I couldn't have done that, not even with you as the prize." She shuddered.

A queer, indescribable chill ran through his veins. "Do you — have you ever thought that he may have held you out as a prize — for me?"

"You mean?" She went very white. "God above us, no! If I thought *that*, Braden, then there would be something lying between us, something that even such as I could not overcome."

"Just the same," he went on grimly, "he went to his death with a word of praise on his lips for you, Anne. He told me you were deserving of something better than the fate he had provided for you. He was sorry. It — it may have been that he was pleading your cause, that —"

"I would like to think that of him," she cried eagerly, "even though his praise fell upon deaf ears."

She turned away from him and sank wearily into a chair. For a minute or two he stood there regarding her in silence. He was sorry for her. It had taken a good deal of courage to humble herself in his eyes, as she had done by her frank avowal.

"Is it any satisfaction to your pride, Anne," he said slowly, after deliberate thought, "to know that I love you and always will love you, in spite of everything?"

Her answer was a long time in coming, and it surprised him when it did come.

"If I had any pride left I should hate you for humbling it in that manner, Braden," she said, little red spots appearing on her cheeks. "I am not asking for your pity."

"I did not mean to —" he cried impulsively. For an

instant he threw all restraint aside. The craving mastered him. He sprang forward.

She closed her eyes quickly, and held her breath.

He was almost at her side when he stopped short. Then she heard the rush of his feet and, the next instant, the banging of the hall door. He was gone! She opened her eyes slowly, and stared dully, hazily before her. For a long time she sat as one unconscious. The shock of realisation left her without the strength or the desire to move. Comprehension was slow in coming to her in the shock of disappointment. She could not realise that she was not in his arms. He had leaped forward to clasp her, she had felt his outstretched arms encircling her,— it was hard to believe that she sat there alone and that the ecstasy was not real.

Tears filled her eyes. She did not attempt to wipe them away. She could only stare, unblinking, at the closed door. Sobs were in her throat; she was first cold, then hot as with a fever.

Slowly her breath began to come again, and with it the sobs. Her body relaxed, she closed her eyes again and let her head fall back against the chair, and for many minutes she remained motionless, still with the weakness of one who has passed through a great crisis. . . . Long afterward,— she did not know how long it was,— she laid her arms upon the window-sill at her side and buried her face on them. The sobs died away and the tears ceased flowing. Then she raised her eyes and stared down into the hot, crowded street far below. She looked upon sordid, cheap, ugly things down there, and she had been looking at paradise such a little while ago.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet. Her tall, glorious

figure was extended to its full height, and her face was transformed with the light of exaltation.

A key grated noisily in the hall door. The next instant it swung violently open and her brother George strode in upon her,— big, clear-eyed, happy-faced and eager.

"Hello!" he cried, stopping short. "I popped in early to-day. Matter of great importance to talk over with my heir. Wait a second, Anne. I'll be back — I say, what's the matter? You look posi-*tive*-ly as if you were on the point of bursting into grand opera. Going to sing?"

"I'm singing all over, Georgie,— all over, inside and out," she cried joyously.

"Gee whiz!" he gasped. "Has the baby begun to talk?"

CHAPTER XXV

SHE did not meet him again at Lutie's. Purposely, and with a cunning somewhat foreign to her sex, she took good care that he should not be there when she made her daily visits. She made it an object to telephone every day, ostensibly to inquire about Lutie's condition, and she never failed to ask what the doctor had said. In that way she knew that he had made his visit and had left the apartment. She would then drive up into Harlem and sit happily with her sister-in-law and the baby, whom she adored with a fervour that surprised not only herself but the mother, whose ideas concerning Anne were undergoing a rapid and enduring reformation.

She was shocked and not a little disillusioned one day, however, when Lutie, now able to sit up and chatter to her heart's content, remarked, with a puzzled frown on her pretty brow:

"Dr. Braden must be terribly rushed with work nowadays, Anne. For the last week he has been coming here at the most unearthly hour in the morning, and dashing away like a shot just as soon as he can. Good gracious, we're hardly awake when he gets here. Never later than eight o'clock."

Anne's temple came down in a heap. He wasn't playing the game at all as she had expected. He was avoiding *her*. She was dismayed for an instant, and then laughed outright quite frankly at her own disenchantment.

Lutie looked at her with deep affection in her eyes. "You ought to have a little baby of your own, Anne," she said.

"It's much nicer having yours," said Anne. "He's such a fat one."

Two weeks later they were all up in the country, and George was saying twice a day at least that Anne was the surprise and comfort of his old age. She was as gay as a lark. She sang,— but not grand opera selections. Her days were devoted to the cheerful occupation of teaching young Carnahan how to smile and how to count his toes.

But in the dark hours of the night she was not so serene. Then was her time for reflection, for wonder, for speculation. Was life to be always like this? Were her days to be merry and confident, and her nights as full of loneliness and doubt? Was her craving never to be satisfied? Sometimes when George and Lutie went off to bed and left her sitting alone on the dark, screened-in veranda, looking down from the hills across the sombre Hudson, she almost cried aloud in her desolation. Of what profit was love to her? Was she always to go on being alone with the love that consumed her?

The hot, dry summer wore away. She steadfastly refused to go to the cool seashore, she declined the countless invitations that came to her, and she went but seldom into the city. Her mother was at Newport. They had had one brief, significant encounter just before the elder woman went off to the seashore. No doubt her mother considered herself entitled to a fair share of "the spoils," but she would make no further advances. She had failed earlier in the game; she would not humble herself again. And so, one hot day in August, just be-

fore going to the country, Anne went up to her old home, determined to have it out with her mother.

"Why are you staying in town through all of this heat, mother dear?" she asked. Her mother was looking tired and listless. She was showing her age, and that was the one thing that Anne could not look upon with complacency.

"I can't afford to go junketing about this year," said her mother, simply. "This awful war has upset —"

"The war hasn't had time to upset anything over here, mother. It's only been going on a couple of weeks. You ought to go away, dearest, for a good long snooze in the country. You'll be as young as a débutante by the time the season sets in."

Mrs. Tresslyn smiled aridly. "Am I beginning to show my age so much as all this, Anne?" she lamented. "I'm just a little over fifty. That isn't old in these days, my dear."

"You look worried, not old," said her daughter, sympathetically. "Is it money?"

"It's always money," admitted Mrs. Tresslyn. "I may as well make up my mind to retrench, to live a little more simply. You would think that I should be really quite well-to-do nowadays, having successfully gotten rid of my principal items of expense. But I will be quite frank with you, Anne. I am still trying to pay off obligations incurred before I lost my excellent son and daughter. You were luxuries, both of you, my dear."

Anne was shocked. "Do you mean to say that you are still paying off — still paying up for *us?* Good heavens, mamma! Why, we couldn't have got you into debt to that —"

"Don't jump to conclusions, my dear," her mother

interrupted. "The debts were not all due to you and George. I had a few of my own. What I mean to say is that, combining all of them, they form quite a handsome amount."

"Tell me," said Anne determinedly, "tell me just how much of it should be charged up to George and me."

"I haven't the remotest idea. You see, I was above keeping books. What are you trying to get at? A way to square up with me? Well, my dear, you can't do that, you know. You don't owe me anything. Whatever I spent on you, I spent cheerfully, gladly, and without an idea of ever receiving a penny in the shape of recompense. That's the way with a mother, Anne. No matter what she may do for her children, no matter how much she may sacrifice for them, she does it without a single thought for herself. That is the best part of being a mother. A wife may demand returns from her husband, but a mother never thinks of asking anything of her children. I am sure that even worse mothers than I will tell you the same. We never ask for anything in return but a little selfish pleasure in knowing that we have borne children that are invariably better than the children that any other mother may have brought into the world. No, you owe me nothing, Anne. Put it out of your mind."

Anne listened in amazement. "But if you are hard-up, mother dear, and on account of the money you were obliged to spend on us — because we were both spoiled and selfish — why, it is only right and just that your children, if they can afford to do so, should be allowed to turn the tables on you. It shouldn't be so one-sided, this little selfish pleasure that you mention. I am rich. I have a great deal more than I need. I have nearly a hundred thousand a year. You —"

"Has any one warned you not to talk too freely about it in these days of income tax collectors?" broke in her mother, with a faint smile.

"Pooh! Simmy attends to that for me. I don't understand a thing about it. Now, see here, mother, I insist that it is my right,— not my duty, but my right — to help you out of the hole. You would do it for me. You've done it for George, time and again. How much do you need?"

Mrs. Tresslyn regarded her daughter thoughtfully. "Back of all this, I suppose, is the thought that it was I who made a rich girl of you. You feel that it is only right that you should share the spoils with your partner, not with your mother."

"Once and for all, mother, let me remind you that I do not blame you for making a rich woman of me. I did not have to do it, you know. I am not the sort that can be driven or coerced. I made my own calculations and I took my own chances. You were my support but not my *commander*. The super-virtuous girls you read about in books are always blaming their mothers for such marriages as mine, and so do the comic papers. It's all bosh. Youth abhors old age. It loves itself too well. But we needn't discuss responsibilities. The point is this: I have more money than I know what to do with, so I want to help you out. It isn't because I think it is my duty, or that I owe it to you, but because I love you, mother. If you had forced me into marrying Mr. Thorpe, I should hate you now. But I don't,— I love you dearly. I want you to let me love you. You are so hard to get close to,— so hard to —"

"My dear, my dear," cried her mother, coming up to her and laying her hands on the tall girl's shoulders,

"you have paid me in full now. What you have just said pays off all the debts. I was afraid that my children hated me."

"You poor old dear!" cried Anne, her eyes shining. "If you will only let me show you how much I can love you. We are pretty much alike, mother, you and I. We —"

"No!" cried out the other fiercely. "I do not want you to say that. I do not want you to be like me. Never say that to me again. I want you to be happy, and you will never be happy if you are like me."

"Piffle!" said Anne, and kissed her mother soundly. And she knew then, as she had always known, that her mother was not and never could be a happy woman. Even in her affection for her own children she was the spirit of selfishness. She loved them for what they meant to her and not for themselves. She was consistent. She knew herself better than any one else knew her.

"Now, tell me how much you need," went on Anne, eagerly. "I've hated to broach the subject to you. It didn't seem right that I should. But I don't care now. I want to do all that I can."

"I will not offend you, or insult you, Anne, by saying that you are a good girl,— a better one than I thought you would ever be. You can't help me, however. Don't worry about me. I shall get on, thank you."

"Just the same, I insist on paying your bills, and setting you straight once more for another fling. And you are going to Newport this week. Come, now, mother dear, let's get it over with. Tell me about *everything*. You may hop into debt again just as soon as you like, but I'll feel a good deal better if I know that it isn't on

my account. It isn't right that you should still have George and me hanging about your neck like millstones. Come! I insist. Let's figure it all up."

An hour afterward, she said to her mother: "I'll make out one check to you covering everything, mother. It will look better if you pay them yourself. Thirty-seven thousand four hundred and twelve dollars. That's everything, is it,— you're sure?"

"Everything," said Mrs. Tresslyn, settling back in her chair. "I will not attempt to thank you, Anne. You see, I didn't thank Lutie when she threw her money in my face, for somehow I knew that I'd give it all back to her again. Well, you may have to wait longer than she did, my dear, but this will all come back to you. I sha'n't live forever, you know."

Anne kissed her. "You are a wonder, mother dear. You wouldn't come off of your high-horse for anything, would you? By Jove, that's what I like most in you. You never knuckle."

"My dear, you are picking up a lot of expressions from Lutie."

The early evenings at Anne's place in the country were spent solely in discussions of the great war. There was no other topic. The whole of the civilised world was talking of the stupendous conflict that had burst upon it like a crash out of a clear sky. George came home loaded down with the latest extras and all of the regular editions of the afternoon papers.

"By gemini," he was in the habit of saying, "it's a lucky thing for those Germans that Lutie got me to re-enlist with her a year ago. I'd be on my way over there by this time, looking for real work. Gee, Anne, that's one thing I could do as well as anybody. I'm big enough to stop a lot of bullets. We'll never see another

scrap like this. It's just my luck to be happily married when it bursts out, too."

"I am sure you would have gone," said Lutie serenely. "I'm glad I captured you in time. It saves the Germans an awful lot of work."

The smashing of Belgium, the dash of the great German army toward Paris, the threatened disaster to the gay capital, the sickening conviction that nothing could check the tide of guns and men,— all these things bore down upon them with a weight that seemed unbearable. And then came the battle of the Marne! Von Kluck's name was on the lips of every man, woman and child in the United States of America. Would they crush him? Was Paris safe? What was the matter with England? And then, the personal element came into the situation for Anne and her kind: the names of the officers who had fallen, snuffed out in Belgium and France. Nearly every day brought out the name of some one she had known, a few of them quite well. There were the gallant young Belgians who had come over for the horse-shows, and the polo-players she had known in England, and the gay young noblemen,— their names brought the war nearer home and sickened her.

As time went on the horrors of the great conflict were deprived, through incessant repetition, of the force to shock a world now accustomed to the daily slaughter of thousands. Humanity had got used to war. War was no longer a novelty. People read of great battles in which unprecedented numbers of men were slain, and wondered how much of truth was in the reports. War no longer horrified the distant on-looker. The sufferings of the Belgians were of greater interest to the people of America than the sufferings of the poor devils in the trenches or on the battle lines. A vast wave of

sympathy was sweeping the land and purses were touched as never before. War was on parade. The world turned out en masse to see the spectacle. The heart of every good American was touched by what he saw, and the hand of every man was held out to stricken Belgium, nor was any hand empty. Belgium presented the grewsome spectacle, and the world paid well for the view it was having.

It was late in November when Anne and the others came down to the city, and by that time the full strength of the movement to help the sufferers had been reached. People were fighting for the Belgians, but with their hearts instead of their hands. The stupendous wave of sympathy was at its height. It rolled across the land and then across the sea. People were swept along by its mighty rush. Anne Thorpe was caught up in the maelstrom of human energy.

Something fine in her nature, however, caused Anne to shrink from public benefactions. She realised that a world that was charitable to the Belgians was not so apt to be charitable toward her. While she did not contribute anonymously to the fund, she let it be distinctly understood that her name was not to be published in any of the lists of donors, except in a single instance when she gave a thousand dollars. That much, at least, would be expected of her and she took some comfort in the belief that the world would not charge her with self-exploitation on the money she had received from Templeton Thorpe. Other gifts and contributions were never mentioned in the press by the committees in charge. She gave liberally, not only to the sufferers on the other side of the Atlantic but to the poor of New York, and she steadfastly declined to serve on any of the relief committees."

Never until now had she appreciated how thin-skinned she was. It is not to be inferred that she shut herself up and affected a life of seclusion. As a matter of fact, she went out a great deal, but invariably among friends and to small, intimate affairs.

Not once in the months that followed the scene in Lutie's sitting-room did she encounter Braden Thorpe. She heard of him frequently. He was very busy. He went nowhere except where duty called. There was not a moment in her days, however, when her thoughts were not for him. Her eyes were always searching the throngs on Fifth Avenue in quest of his figure; in restaurants she looked eagerly over the crowded tables in the hope that she might see actually the face that was always before her, night and day. Be it said to her credit, she resolutely abstained from carrying her quest into quarters where she might be certain of seeing him, of meeting him, of receiving recognition from him. She avoided the neighbourhood in which his offices were located, she shunned the streets which he would most certainly traverse. While she longed for him, craved him with all the hunger of a starved soul, she was content to wait. He loved her. She thrived on the joy of knowing this to be true. He might never come to her, but she knew that it would never be possible for her to go to him unless he called her to him.

Then, one day in early January, she crumpled up under the shock of seeing his name in the headlines of her morning newspaper.

He was going to the front!

For a moment she was blind. The page resolved itself into a thick mass of black. She was in bed when the paper was brought to her with her coffee. She had been lying there sweetly thinking of him. Up to the

instant her eyes fell upon the desolating headline she had been warm and snug and tingling with life just aroused. And then she was as cold as ice, stupefied. It was a long time before she was able to convince herself that the type was really telling her something that she would have to believe. He was going to the war!

Thorpe was one of a half-dozen American surgeons who were going over on the steamer sailing that day to give their services to the French. The newspaper spoke of him in glowing terms. His name stood out above all the others, for he was the one most notably in the public eye at the moment. The others, just as brave and self-sacrificing as he, were briefly mentioned and that was all. He alone was in the headlines, he alone was discussed. No one was to be allowed to forget that he was the clever young surgeon who had saved the great Marraville. The account dwelt upon the grave personal sacrifice he was making in leaving New York just as the world was beginning to recognise his great genius and ability. Prosperity was knocking at his door, fame was holding out its hand to him, and yet he was casting aside all thought of self-aggrandisement, all personal ambition in order to go forth and serve humanity in fields where his name would never be mentioned except in a cry for help from strong men who had known no fear.

Sailing that day! Anne finally grasped the meaning of the words. She would not see him again. He would go away without a word to her, without giving her the chance to say good-bye, despite her silly statement that she would never utter the words again where he was concerned.

Slowly the warm glow returned to her blood. Her brain cleared, and she was able to think, to grasp at the

probable significance of his action in deserting New York and his coveted opportunities. Something whispered to her that he was going away because of his own sufferings and not those of the poor wretches at the front. Her heart swelled with pity. There was no triumph in the thought that he was running away because of his love for her. She needed no such proof as this to convince her that his heart was more loyal to her than his mind would have it be. She cried a little . . . and then got up and called for a messenger boy.

This brief message went down to the ship:

"God be with you. I still do not say good-bye, just God be with you always, as I shall be. ANNE."

She did not leave the hotel until long after the ship had sailed. He did not telephone. There were a dozen calls on the wire that morning, but she had her maid take the messages. There was always the fear that he might try to reach her while some one of her idle friends was engaged in making a protracted visit with her over the wire. About one o'clock Simmy Dodge called up to ask if he could run in and have luncheon with her.

"I've got a message for you," he said.

Her heart began to beat so violently that she was afraid he would hear it through the receiver at his ear. She could not trust herself to speak for a moment. Evidently he thought she was preparing to put him off with some polite excuse. Simmy was, as ever, considerate. He made haste to spare her the necessity for fibbing. "I can drop in late this afternoon —"

"No," she cried out, "come now, Simmy. I shall expect you. Where are you?"

He coughed in some embarrassment. "I'm — well, you see, I was going past so I thought I'd stop in and — What? Yes, I'm downstairs."

She joined him in the palm room a few minutes later, and they went in to luncheon. Her colour was high. Simmy thought he had never seen her when she looked more beautiful. But he thought that with each succeeding glimpse of her.

"'Pon my word, Anne," he said, staring at her across the table, "you fairly dazzle me. Forgive me for saying so. I couldn't help it. Perfect ass sometimes, you see."

"I forgive you. I like it. What message did Braden send to me?"

He had not expected her to be so frank, so direct. "I don't know. I wish I did. The beggar wrote it and sealed it up in this beastly little envelope." He handed her the square white envelope with the ship's emblem in the corner.

Before looking at the written address, she put her next question to him. A good deal depended on his answer. "Do you know when he wrote this note, Simmy?"

"Just before they pushed me down the gang-plank," he said. A light broke in upon him. "Did you send him a message?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't know whether it is the right thing to say, but I can tell you this: he wrote this note before reading your letter or telegram or whatever it was. He had a score of things like that and he didn't open one of 'em until she'd cast off."

She smiled. "Thank you, Simmy. You have said the right thing,— as you always do." One glance at the superscription was enough. It was in his handwriting. For the first time she saw it in his hand:

"Anne Tresslyn Thorpe." A queer little shiver ran through her, never to be explained.

Simmy watched her curiously as she slipped the missive, unopened, into her gold mesh bag. "Don't mind me," he said. "Read it."

"Not now, Simmy," she said simply. And all through luncheon she thrilled with the consciousness that she had something of Braden there with her, near her, waiting for her. His own hand had touched this bit of paper; it was a part of him. It was so long since she had seen that well-known, beloved handwriting, — strong like the man, and sure; she found herself counting the ages that had passed since his last love missive had come to her.

Simmy was rattling on, rather dolefully, about Braden's plans. He was likely to be over there for a long time,— just as long as he was needed or able to endure the strain of hard, incessant work in the field hospitals.

"I wanted to go," the little man was saying, and that brought her back to earth. "The worst way, Anne. But what could I do? Drive an automobile, yes, but what's that? Brady wouldn't hear to it. He said it was nonsense, me talking of going over there and getting in people's way. Of course, I'd probably faint the first time I saw a mutilated dead body, and that *would* irritate the army. They'd have to stop everything while they gave me smelling salts. I suppose I'd get used to seeing 'em dead all over the place, just as everybody does,— even the worst of cowards. I'm not a coward, Anne. I drive my racing-car at ninety miles, I play polo, I go up in Scotty's aeroplane whenever I get a chance, I can refuse to take a drink when I think

I've had enough, and if that doesn't prove that I've got courage I'd like to know what it does prove. But I'm not a fighting man. Nobody would ever be afraid of me. There isn't a German on earth who would run if he saw me charging toward him. He'd just wait to see what the dickens I was up to. Something would tell him that I wouldn't have the heart to shoot him, no matter how necessary it might be for me to do so. Still I wanted to go. That's what amazes me. I can't understand it."

"I can understand it, you poor old simpleton," cried Anne. "You wanted to go because you are *not* afraid."

"I wish I could think so," said he, really perplexed. "Brady is different. He'd be a soldier as is a soldier. He's going over to save men's lives, however, and that's something I wouldn't be capable of doing. If I went they'd expect me to kill 'em, and that's what I'd hate. Good Lord, Anne, I couldn't shoot down a poor German boy that hadn't done a thing to me — or to my country, for that matter. If they'd only let me go as a spy, or even a messenger boy, I'd jump at the chance. But they'd want me to kill people,— and I couldn't do it, that's all."

"Is Braden well? Does he look fit, Simmy? You know there will be great hardships, vile weather, exposure —"

"He's thin and — well, I'll be honest with you, he doesn't look as fit as might be."

She paled. "Has he been ill?"

"Not in body, but — he's off his feed, Anne. Maybe you know the reason why." He looked at her narrowly.

"I have not seen him in months," she said evasively.

"I guess that's the answer," he said, pulling at his little moustache. "I'm sorry, Anne. It's too bad —

for both of you.. Lordy, I never dreamed I could be so unselfish. I'm mad in love with you myself and — oh, well! That's an old tale, so we'll cut it short. I don't know what I'm going to do without Brady. I've got the blues so bad that — why, I cried like a nasty little baby down there at the — everybody lookin' at me pityingly and saying to themselves 'what a terrible thing grief is when it hits a man like that,' and thinkin' of course that I'd lost a whole family in Belgium or somewhere — oh, Lordy, what a blithering —"

"Hush!" whispered Anne, her own eyes glistening. "You are an angel, Simmy. You —"

"Let's talk sense," he broke in abruptly. "Braden left his business in my hands, and his pleasures in the hands of Dr. Cole. He says it's a pleasure to heal people, so that's why I put it in that way. I've got his will down in our safety vault, and his instructions about that silly foundation —"

"You — you think he may not come back?" she said, gripping her hands under the edge of the table.

"You never can tell. Taking precautions, that's all, as any wise man would do. Oh, I'm sorry, Anne! I should have known better. Lordy, you're as white as — Sure, he'll come back! He isn't going to be in the least danger. Not the least. Nobody bothers the doctors, you know. They can go anywhere. They wear plug hats and all that sort of thing, and all armies respect a plug hat. A plug hat is a *silk* hat, you know,— the safest hat in the world when you're on the firing line. Everybody tries to hit the hat and not the occupant. It's a standing army joke. I was reading in the paper the other day about a fellow going clear from one end of the line to the other and having six hundred and some *odd* plug hats shot off his head without so much as

getting a hair singed. Wait! I can tell what you're going to ask, and I can't, on such short notice, answer the question. I can only say that I don't know where he got the hats. Ah, good! You're laughing again, and, by Jove, it becomes you to blush once in a while, too. Tell me, old lady,"— he leaned forward and spoke very seriously,—" does it mean a great deal to you? "

She nodded her head slowly. " Yes, Simmy, it means everything.'

He drew a long breath. " That's just what I thought. One ordinary dose of common-sense split up between the two of you wouldn't be a bad thing for the case."

" You dear old thing! " cried Anne impulsively.

" How are Lutie and my god-son? " he inquired, with a fine air of solicitude.

Half an hour later, Anne read the brief note that Braden had sent to her. She read it over and over again, and without the exultation she had anticipated. Her heart was too full for exultation.

" Dear Anne," it began, " I am going to the war. I am going because I am a coward. The world will call me brave and self-sacrificing, but it will not be true. I am a coward. The peril I am running away from is far greater than that which awaits me over there. I thought you would like to know. The suffering of others may cause me to forget my own at times." He signed it " Braden "; and below the signature there was a postscript that puzzled her for a long time. " If you are not also a coward you will return to my grandfather's house, where you belong."

And when she had solved the meaning of that singular postscript she sent for Wade.

CHAPTER XXVI

ANNE THORPE had set her heart on an eventuality. She could see nothing else, think of nothing else. She prayed each night to God,— and devoutly,— not alone for the safe return of her lover, but that God would send him home soon! She was conscious of no fear that he might never return at all.

To the surprise of every one, with the approach of spring, she announced her determination to reopen the old Thorpe residence and take up her abode therein. George was the only one who opposed her. He was seriously upset by the news.

"Good heaven, Anne, you don't *have* to live in the house, so why do it? It's like a tomb. I get the shivers every time I think about it. You can afford to live anywhere you like. It isn't as if you were obliged to think of expenses —"

"It seems rather silly *not* to live in it," she countered. "I will admit that at first I couldn't endure the thought of it, but that was when all of the horrors were fresh in my mind. Besides, I resented his leaving it to me. It was not in the bargain, you know. There was something high-handed, too, in the way I was *ordered* to live in the house. I had the uncanny feeling that he was trying to keep me where he could watch — but, of course, that was nonsense. There is no reason why I shouldn't live in the house, Georgie. It is —"

"There is a blamed good reason why you should never have lived in it," he blurted out. "There's no use digging it up, however, so we'll let it stay buried."

He argued bitterly, even doggedly, but finally gave it up. "Well," he said in the end, "if you will, you will. All the King's horses and all the King's men can't stop you when you've once made up your mind."

A few days later she called for Lutie in the automobile and they went together to the grim old house near Washington Square. Her mind was made up, as George had put it. She was going to open the house and have it put in order for occupancy as soon as possible.

She had solved the meaning of Braden's postscript. She would have to prove to him, first of all, that she was not afraid of the shadow that lay inside the walls of that grim old house. "If you are not also a coward you will return to my grandfather's house, where you belong." It was, she honestly believed, his way of telling her that if she faced the shadow in her own house, and put it safely behind her, her fortitude would not go unrewarded!

It did not occur to her that she was beginning badly when she delayed going down to the house for two whole days because Lutie was unable to accompany her.

The windows and doors were boarded up. There was no sign of life about the place when they got down from the limousine and mounted the steps at the heels of the footman who had run on ahead to ring the bell. They waited for the opening of the inner door and the shooting of the bolts in the storm-doors, but no sound came to their ears. Again the bell jangled,—how well she remembered the old-fashioned bell at the end of the hall! — and still no response from within.

The two women looked at each other oddly. "Try the basement door," said Anne to the man. They stood at the top of the steps while the footman tried the iron

gate that barred the way to the tradesmen's door. It was pad-locked.

"I asked Simmy to meet us here at eleven," said Anne nervously. "I expect it will cost a good deal to do the house over as I want — Doesn't any one answer, Peters?"

"No, ma'am. Maybe he's out."

Lutie's face blanched suddenly. "My goodness, Anne, what if — what if he's dead in —"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Lutie," cried Anne impatiently, "don't go to imagining — Still it's very odd. Pound on the door, Peters,— hard."

She shivered a little and turned away so that Lutie could not see the expression in her eyes. "I have had no word from him in nearly two weeks. He calls up once every fortnight to inquire — You are not pounding hard enough, Peters."

"Let's go away," said Lutie, starting down the steps.

"No," said Anne resolutely, "we must get in somehow. He may be ill. He is an old man. He may be lying in there praying for help, dying for lack of —" Then she called out to the chauffeur. "See if you can find a policeman. We may have to break the door down. You see, Lutie, if he's in there I must get to him. We may not be too late."

Lutie rejoined her at the top of the steps. "You're right, Anne. I don't know what possessed me. But, goodness, I *hope* it's nothing —" She shuddered. "He may have been dead for days."

"What a horrible thing it would be if — But it doesn't matter, Lutie; I am going in. If you are nervous or afraid of seeing something unpleasant, don't come with me. Wade must be nearly seventy. He may

have fallen or — Look! Why,— can *that* be him coming up the —" She was staring down the street toward Sixth Avenue. A great breath of relief escaped her lips as she clutched her companion's arm and pointed.

Wade was approaching. He was still half way down the long block, and only an eye that knew him well could have identified him. Even at closer range one might have mistaken him for some one else.

He was walking rather briskly,— in fact, he was strutting. It was not his gait, however, that called for remark. While he was rigidly upright and steady as to progress, his sartorial condition was positively staggering. He wore a high, shiny silk hat. It was set at just the wee bit of an angle and quite well back on his head. Descending his frame, the eye took in a costly fur-lined overcoat with a sable collar, properly creased trousers with a perceptible stripe, grey spats and unusually glistening shoes that could not by any chance have been of anything but patent leather. Light tan gloves, a limber walking stick, a white carnation and a bright red necktie — there you have all that was visible of him. Even at a great distance you would have observed that he was freshly shaved.

Suddenly his eye fell upon the automobile and then took in the smart looking visitors above. His pace slackened abruptly. After a moment of what appeared to be indecision, he came on, rather hurriedly. There had been a second or two of suspense in which Anne had the notion that the extraordinary creature was on the point of darting into a basement door, as if, unlike the peacock, he was ashamed of his plumage.

He came up to them, removing his high hat with an awkwardness that betrayed him. His employer was staring at him with undisguised amazement.

"I just stepped out for a moment, Mrs. Thorpe, to post a letter," said Wade, trying his best not to sink back into servility, and quite miserably failing. He was fumbling for his keys. The tops of the houses across the street appeared to interest him greatly. His gaze was fixed rather intently upon them. "Very sorry, Mrs. Thorpe,— dreadfully sorry. Ahem! Good morning. I hope you have not been waiting long. I — ah, here we are!" He found the key in the pocket of his fancy waistcoat, and bolted down the steps to unlock the gate. "Excuse me, please. I will run in this way and open the door from the —"

"Wade," cried out Mrs. Thorpe, "is it really you?"

He looked astonished — and a trifle hurt. "Who else could I be, Mrs. Thorpe?" Then he darted through the gate and a moment later the servants' door opened and closed behind him.

"I must be dreaming," said Anne. "What in the world has come over the man?"

Lutie closed one eye slowly. "There is only one thing under heaven that could make a man rig himself out like that,— and that thing is a woman."

"A woman? Don't be foolish, Lutie. Wade couldn't even *think* of a woman. He's nearly seventy."

"They think of 'em until they drop, my dear," said Lutie sagely. "That's one thing we've got to give them credit for. They keep on thinking about us even while they're trying to keep the other foot out of the grave. You are going to lose the amiable Wade, Anne dear. He's not wearing spats for nothing."

Some time passed before the key turned in the inner door, and there was still a long wait before the bolts in the storm doors shot back and Wade's face appeared. He had not had the time to remove the neck-

tie and spats, but the rest of his finery had been replaced by the humble togs of service — long service, you would say at a glance.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, ma'am, but —" He held the doors open and the two ladies entered the stuffy, unlighted hall.

"Turn on the lights, please," said Anne quickly. Wade pushed a button and the lights were on. She surveyed him curiously. "Why did you take them off, Wade? You looked rather well in them."

He cleared his throat gently, and the shy, set smile reappeared as if by magic. "It isn't necessary for me to say that I was not expecting you this morning."

"Quite obviously you were not," said Anne drily. She continued to regard him somewhat fixedly. Something in his expression puzzled her. "Mr. Dodge will be here presently. I am making arrangements to open the house."

He started. "Er — not to — er — live in it yourself, of course. I was sure Mr. Dodge would find a way to get around the will so that you could let the house —"

"I expect to live here myself, Wade," said she. After a moment, she went on: "Will you care to stay on?"

He was suddenly confused. "I — I can't give you an answer just at this moment, Mrs. Thorpe. It may be a few days before I —" He paused.

"Take all the time you like, Wade," she interrupted.

"I fancy I'd better give notice now, ma'am," he said after a moment. "To-day will do as well as any day for that." He seemed to straighten out his figure as he spoke, resuming a little of the unsuspected dignity

that had accompanied the silk hat and the fur-lined coat.

"I'm sorry," said Anne,— who was not in the slightest sense sorry. Wade sometimes gave her the creeps.

"I should like to explain about the — ah — the garments you saw me wearing — ah — I mean to say, I should have brought myself to the point of telling you a little later on, in any event, but now that you have caught me wearing of them, I dare say this is as good a time as any to get it over with. First of all, Mrs. Thorpe, I must preface my — er — confession by announcing that I am quite sure that you have always considered me to be an honest man and above deception and falsehood. Ahem! That *is* right, isn't it?"

"What are you trying to get at, Wade?" she cried in surprise. "You cannot imagine that I suspect you of — anything wrong?"

"It may be wrong, and it may not be. I have never felt quite right about it. There have been times when I felt real squeamish — and a bit underhanded, you might say. On the other hand, I submit that it was not altogether reprehensible on my part to air them occasionally — and to see that the moths didn't —"

"Air them? For goodness' sake, Wade, speak plainly. Why shouldn't you air your own clothes? They are very nice looking and they must have cost you a pretty penny. Dear me, I have no right to say what you shall wear on the street or —"

Wade's eyes grew a little wider. "Is it possible, madam, that you failed to recognise the — er — garments?"

She laid her hand upon Lutie's arm, and gripped it convulsively. Her eyes were fixed in a fast-growing look of aversion.

"You do not mean that — that they were Mr. Thorpe's?" she said, in a low voice.

"I supposed, of course, you would have remembered them," said Wade, a trifle sharply. "The overcoat was one that he wore every day when you went out for your drive with him, just before he took to his bed. I —"

"Good heaven!" cried Anne, revolted. "You have been wearing his clothes?"

"They were not really what you would call cast-off garments, ma'am," he explained in some haste, evidently to save his dignity. "They were rather new, you may remember,— that is to say, the coat and vest and trousers. As I recall it, the overcoat was several seasons old, and the hat was the last one he ordered before taking to the comfortable lounge hat — he always had his hats made from his own block, you see, — and as I was about to explain, ma'am, it seemed rather a sin to let them hang in the closet, food for moths and to collect dust in spite of the many times I brushed them. Of course, I should never have presumed to wear them while he was still alive, not even after he had abandoned them for good — No, that is a thing I have never been guilty of doing. I could not have done it. That is just the difference between a man-servant and a woman-servant. Your maid frequently went out in your gowns without your knowledge. I am told it is quite a common practice. At least I may claim for myself the credit of waiting until my employer was dead before venturing to cover my back with his — Yes, honest confession is good for the soul, ma'am. These shoes are my own, and the necktie. He could not abide red neckties. Of course, I need not say that the carnation I wore was quite fresh.

The remainder of my apparel was once worn by my beloved master. I am not ashamed to confess it."

"How *could* you wear the clothes of a — a dead person?" cried Anne, cringing as if touched by some cold and slimy thing.

"It seemed such a waste, madam. Of late I have taken to toning myself up a bit, and there seemed no sensible reason why I shouldn't make use of Mr. Thorpe's clothes,— allow me to explain that I wore only those he had used the least,— provided they were of a satisfactory fit. We were of pretty much the same size,— you will remember that, I'm sure,— and, they fitted me quite nicely. Of course, I should not have taken them away with me when I left your employ, madam. That would have been unspeakable. I should have restored them to the clothes presses, and you would have found them there when I turned over the keys and —"

"Good heavens, man," she cried, "take them away with you when you go — all of them. Everything, do you hear? I give them all to you. Of what use could they be to me? They are yours. Take everything,— hats, boots, linen,—"

"Thank you, ma'am. That is very handsome of you. I wasn't quite sure that perhaps Mr. Braden wouldn't find some use for the overcoat. It is a very elegant coat. It cost —"

"Wade, you are either very stupid or very insolent," she interrupted coldly. "We need not discuss the matter any farther. How soon do you expect to leave?"

"I should say that a week would be sufficient notice, under the circumstances," said he, and chuckled, much to their amazement. "I may as well make a clean breast of it, ma'am. I am going to be married on the

seventeenth of next month. That's just six weeks off and —"

"Married! You?"

"Ah, madam, I trust you will not forget that I have lived a very lonely and you might say profitless life," he said, rubbing his hands together, and allowing his smile to broaden into a pleased grin. "As you may know in the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love,— and so on. A man is as old as he feels. I can't say that I ever felt younger in my life than I have felt during the past month."

"I wish you joy and happiness, Wade," said Anne dumbly. She was staring at his smirking, seamed old face as if fascinated. "I hope she is a good woman and that you will find —"

"She is little more than a girl," said he, straightening his figure still a little more, remembering that he had just spoken of his own youthful feelings. There may have been something of the pride of conquest as well. "Just twenty-one last December."

Lutie laughed out loud. He bent his head quickly and they saw that his lips were compressed.

"I beg your pardon, Wade," cried George's wife. "It — it really isn't anything to laugh at, and I'm sorry."

"That's all right, Mrs. George," he muttered.

"Only twenty-one," murmured Anne, her gaze running over the shabby old figure in front of her. "My God, Wade, is she — what can she be thinking of?"

He looked straight into her eyes, and spoke. "Is it so horrible for a young girl to marry an old man, ma'am?" he asked sorrowfully, and so respectfully that she was deceived into believing that he intended no affront to her.

"They usually know what they are doing when they marry very old men," she replied deliberately. "You must not overlook that fact, Wade. But perhaps it isn't necessary for me to remind you that young girls do not marry old men for love. There may be pity, or sentiment, or duty — but never love. More often than not it is avarice, Wade."

"Quite true," said he. "I am glad to have you speak so frankly to me, ma'am. It proves that you are interested in my welfare."

"Who is she, Wade?" she inquired.

Lutie had passed into the library, leaving them together in the hall. She had experienced a sudden sensation of nausea. It was impossible for her to remain in the presence of this shattered old hulk and still be able to keep the disgust from showing itself in her eyes. She was the wife of a real man, and the wife of a man whom she could love and caress and yield herself to with a thrill of ecstasy in her blood.

"The young lady I was speaking to you about some weeks ago, madam,— the daughter of my friend who conducts the *delicatessen* just below us in Sixth Avenue. You remember I spoke to you of the Southern lady reduced to a commercial career by —"

"I remember. I remember thinking at the time that it might be the mother who would prevail — I am sorry, Wade. I shouldn't have said that —"

"It's quite all right," said he amiably. "It is barely possible — ay, even probable,— that it was the mother who prevailed. They sometimes do, you know. But Marian appears to have a mind of her own. She loves me, Mrs. Thorpe. I am quite sure of that. It would be pretty hard to deceive me."

Through all of this Anne was far from oblivious to

the sinister comparisons the man was drawing. She had always been a little afraid of him. Now an uneasy horror was laying its hold upon her. He had used her as an example in persuading a silly, unsophisticated girl to give herself to him. He had gone about his courtship in the finery his dead master had left behind him.

"I thank you for your good wishes, Mrs. Thorpe," he went on, smoothly. "If it is not too much to ask, I should like to have you say a few good words for me to Marian some day soon. She would be very greatly influenced by the opinion of so great a lady as —"

"But I thought you said it was settled," she broke in sharply.

"It is settled," he said. "But if you would only do me the favour of — er — advising her to name an earlier day than the seventeenth, I —"

"I cannot advise her, Wade," said she firmly. "It is out of the question."

"I am sorry," he said, lowering his gaze. "Mr. Thorpe was my best friend as well as my master. I thought, for his sake, you might consent to —"

"You must do your own pleading, Wade," she interrupted, a red spot appearing in each cheek. Then rashly: "You may continue to court her in Mr. Thorpe's clothes but you need not expect his wife to lend her assistance also."

His eyes glittered. "I am sorry if I have offended you, ma'am. And I thank you for being honest and straightforward with me. It is always best."

"I did not mean to hurt your feelings, Wade," she began, half-sorry for her remark.

"Not in the least, ma'am. Nothing can hurt my feelings. You see, I lived with Mr. Thorpe a great deal

longer than you did. I got quite beyond being hurt."

She drew a step nearer. "Wade," she said quietly, "I am going to advise you, not this wretched girl who is planning to marry you. How old are you?"

"Two score and a half and five," he answered promptly. Evidently he had uttered the glib lie before, and as on another occasion he waited for his listener to reduce the words to figures.

"Fifty-five," said Anne, after some time. She was not good at mathematics. "I thought you were older than that. It doesn't matter, however. You are fairly well-off, I believe. Upwards of fifty thousand dollars, no doubt. Now, I shall be quite frank with you. This girl is taking you for your money. Just a moment, if you please. I do not know her, and I may be doing her an injustice. You have compared her to me in reaching your conclusions. You do not deceive yourself any more than Mr. Thorpe deceived himself. He knew I did not love him, and you must know that the same condition exists in this affair of yours. You have thanked me for being honest. Well, I was honest with Mr. Thorpe. I would have been as true as steel to him, even if he had lived to be an hundred. The question you must ask of yourself is this, Wade: Will this girl be as true as steel to you? Is there no other man to be afraid of?"

He listened intently. A certain greyness crept into his hollow cheeks.

"Was there no other man when you married Mr. Thorpe?" he asked levelly.

"Yes, there was," she surprised him by replying. "An honest man, however. I think you know —"

She scarcely heard Wade as he went on, now in a most conciliatory way. "It may interest you to know that

I have arranged to buy out the delicatessen. We expect to enlarge and tidy the place up just as soon as we can get around to it. I believe I shall be very happy, once I get into active business. Mrs. Gadscomb,— that's the present mother,— I mean to say, the present owner, Marian's mother, has agreed to conduct the place as heretofore, at a very excellent salary, and I have no fear as to — But excuse me for going on like this, ma'am. No doubt you would like to talk about your own affairs instead of listening to mine. You said something about opening the house and coming back here to live. Of course, I shall consider it my duty to remain here just as long as I can be of service to you. There will be a little plumbing needed on the third floor, and I fancy a general cleaning —"

"Thank heaven, there is Mr. Dodge at last," cried Anne, as the bell jangled almost over her head, startling her into a little cry of alarm.

As Wade shuffled toward the front door, once more the simple slave of circumstance, she fled quickly into the library.

"Oh, Lutie," she cried, sinking into a chair beside the long, familiar table, and beating with her clenched hands upon the surface of it, "I know at last just how I look to other people. My God in heaven, what a *thing* I must seem to you."

Lutie came swiftly out of the shadows and laid her hands upon the shoulders of her sister-in-law.

"You ought to thank the Lord, dear old girl, for the revelation," she said gently. "I guess it's just what you've needed." Then she leaned over and pressed her warm, soft cheek to Anne's cold one. "If I owned this house," she said almost in a whisper, "I'd renovate it from top to bottom. I'd get rid of more than old Wade

and the old clothes. The best and cheapest way to renovate it would be to set fire to a barrel of kerosene in the basement."

"Oh, how horrible for that girl to marry a dreadful, shrivelled old man like Wade. The skin on his hands is all wrinkled and loose — I couldn't help noticing it as I —"

"Hello!" called out Simmy from the doorway, peering into the darkened room. "Where the deuce are you? Ah, that's better, Wade." The caretaker had switched on the lights in the big chandelier. "Sorry to be late, Anne. Morning, Lutie. How's my god-son? Couldn't get here a minute sooner. You see, Anne, I've got other clients besides you. Braden, for instance. I've been carrying out his instructions in regard to that confounded trusteeship. The whole matter is to be looked after by a Trust Company from now on. Simplifies matters enormously."

Anne started up. "Isn't — isn't he coming back to America?" she cried.

"Sure,— unless they pink him some day. My goodness, you don't suppose for an instant that he could manage the whole of that blooming foundation and have any time to spare for *hopeful* humanity,— do you? Why, it will take a force of half a dozen men to keep the books straight and look after the ever-increasing capital. By the time old Brady is ready to start the ball rolling there will be so much money stored up for the job that Rockefeller will be ashamed to mention the pitiful fortune he controls. In the meantime he can go on saving people's lives while the trust company saves the Foundation."

CHAPTER XXVII

THORPE returned to New York about the middle of May, in the tenth month of the war. The true facts concerning the abrupt severance of his connections with the hospital corps in France were never divulged. His confrères and his superiors maintained a discreet and loyal silence. It was to Simmy that he explained the cause of his retirement. Word had gone out among the troops that he was the American doctor whose practices were infinitely more to be feared than the bullets from an enemy's guns. . . . It was announced from headquarters that he was returning to the United States on account of ill-health. He had worked hard and unceasingly and had exposed himself to grave physical hardships. He came home with a medal for conspicuous and unexampled valour while actually under fire. One report had it that on more than one occasion he appeared not only to scorn death but to invite it, so reckless were his deeds.

. . . . . .

Meanwhile James Marraville died in great agony. Those nearest to him said, in so many words, that it was a great pity he did not die at the time of the operation.

. . . . . .

"But," began one of the reporters at the dock, "you are said to have risked your own life, Dr. Thorpe, on at least half a dozen occasions when you exposed yourself to the fire of the enemy by going out in front after men who had fallen and were as good as dead when you got

to them. In every case, we are told the men died on the stretchers while they were being carried to the rear. Do you mind telling us why you brought those men back when you knew that they were bound to die —"

"You have been misinformed," interrupted Thorpe. "One of those men did not die. I did all that was possible to save the lives as well as the bodies of those wretched fellows. Not one of them appeared to have a chance. The one who survived was in the most hopeless condition of them all. He is alive to-day, but without legs or arms. He is only twenty-two. He may live to be seventy. The others died. Will you say that they are not better off than he? And yet we tried to save them all. That is what we were there for. I saw a man run a bayonet through the heart of his own brother one day. We were working over him at the time and we knew that our efforts would be useless. The brother knew it also. He merely did the thing we refused to do. You want to know why I deliberately picked out of all the wounded the men who seemed to have the least chance for recovery, and brought them back to a place of safety. Well, I will tell you quite frankly, why I chose those men from among all the others. They were being left behind. They were as good as dead, as you say. I wanted to treat the most hopeless cases that could be found. I wanted to satisfy myself. I went about it quite cold-bloodedly,— not bravely, as the papers would have it,— and I confess that I passed by men lying out there who might have had a chance, looking for those who apparently had none. Seven of them died, as you say,— seven of the 'hopelessly afflicted.' One of them lived. You will now say that having proved to my own satisfaction that no man can be 'hopelessly afflicted,' I should be ready to admit the fallacy of my preachings.

But you are wrong. I am more firmly intrenched in my position than ever before. That man's life should not have been saved. We did him a cruel wrong in saving it for him. He wanted to die, he still wants to die. He will curse God to the end of his days because he was allowed to live. Some day his relatives will exhibit him in public, as one of the greatest of freaks, and people will pay to enter the side shows to see him. They will carry him about in shawl straps. He will never be able to protest, for he has lost the power of speech. He can only *see* and *hear*. Will you be able to look into the agonised eyes of that man as he lies propped up in a chair, a mere trunk, and believe that he is glad to be alive? Will you then rejoice over the fact that we saved him from a much nobler grave than the one he occupies in the side-show, where all the world may stare at him at so much per head? An inglorious reward, gentlemen, for a brave soldier of the Republic."

"We may quote you as saying, Dr. Thorpe, that you have not abandoned your theories?"

"Certainly. I shall go on preaching, as you are pleased to call my advocacy. A great many years from to-day — centuries, no doubt,— the world will think as I do now. Thank you, gentlemen, for your courtesy in —"

"Have you heard that James Marraville died last week, Dr. Thorpe?" broke in one of the reporters.

"No," said he, quite unmoved. "I am not surprised, however. I gave him five or six months."

"Didn't you expect him to get entirely well?" demanded the man, surprised.

Braden shook his head, smiling. "No one expected that, gentlemen,— not even Mr. Marraville."

"But every one thought that the operation was a success, and —"

"And so it was, gentlemen," said Thorpe unsmilingly; "a very terrible success."

"Gee, if we print that as coming from you, Dr. Thorpe, it will create the biggest sensation in years."

"Then I haven't the least doubt that you will print it," said Thorpe.

There was a short silence. Then the spokesman said: "I think I speak for every man here when I say that we will not print it, Dr. Thorpe. We understand, but the people wouldn't." He deliberately altered the character of the interview and inquired if German submarines had been sighted after the steamship left Liverpool. The whole world was still shuddering over the disaster to the *Lusitania*, torpedoed the week before, with the loss of over a thousand souls.

Thorpe drove uptown with Simmy Dodge, who would not hear of his going to an hotel, but conducted him to his own apartment where he was to remain as long as he pleased.

"Get yourself pulled together, old chap, before you take up any work," advised Simmy. "You look pretty seedy. We're going to have a hot summer, they say. Don't try to do too much until you pick up a bit. Too bad they're fighting all over the continent of Europe. If they weren't, hang me if I wouldn't pack you onto a boat and take you over there for a good long rest, in spite of what happened to the *Lusitania*. We'll go up into the mountains in June, Brady,— or what do you say to skipping out to the San Francisco fair for a few —"

"I'm going to buckle down to work as soon as I've got my kit unpacked," said Thorpe quietly.

"You're looking thin and sort of pegged out, old boy," began Simmy soothingly.

"I'm all right, Simmy. Sound as anything. I don't mind telling you that it wasn't my health that drove me out of the service,— and that's what hurts. They — they didn't want me. They thought it was best for me to get out."

"Good Lord!" gasped Simmy, struggling between amazement and indignation. "What kind of blithering fools have they got over —"

"They are not blithering fools," said Thorpe soberly. "The staff would not have turned me out, I'm sure of that. I was doing good work, Simmy," he went on rapidly, eagerly, "even though I do say it myself. Everybody was satisfied, I'm sure. Night and day,— all the time,— mind you, and I was standing up under it better than any of them. But, you see, it wasn't the staff that did it. It was the poor devil of a soldier out there in the trenches. They found out who I was. Newspapers, of course. Well, that tells the story. They were afraid of me. But I am not complaining. I do not blame them. God knows it was hard enough for them to face death out there at the front without having to think of — well, getting it anyhow if they fell into my hands. I — But there's no use speaking of it, Simmy. I wanted you to know why I got out, and I want Anne to know. As for the rest, let them think I was sick or — cowardly if they like."

Simmy was silent for a long time. He said afterwards that it was all he could do to keep from crying as he looked at the pale, gaunt face of his friend and listened to the verdict of the French soldiers.

"I don't see the necessity for telling Anne," he said, at last, pulling rather roughly at his little moustache.

They were seated at one of the broad windows in Simmy's living-room, drinking in the cool air that came up from the west in advance of an impending thunderstorm. The day had been hot and stifling. "No sense in letting her know, old man. Secret between you and me, if you don't —"

"I'd rather she knew," said Thorpe briefly. "In fact, she will have to know."

"What do you mean?"

Thorpe was staring out over the Park, and did not answer. Simmy found another cigarette and lighted it, scorching his fingers while furtively watching his companion's face.

"How is Anne, Simmy?" demanded Thorpe abruptly. There was a fierce, eager light in his eyes, but his manner was strangely repressed. "Where is she?"

Simmy took a deep breath. "She's well and she's at home."

"You mean,— down there in the old —"

"The old Thorpe house. I don't know what's got into the girl, Brady. First she swears she won't live in the house, and then she turns around,— just like that, — and moves in. Workmen all over the place, working overtime and all that sort of thing,— with Anne standing around punchin' 'em with a sharp stick if they don't keep right on the job. Top to bottom,— renovated, redecorated, brightened up,— wouldn't recognise the place as —"

"Is she living there — alone?"

"Yes. New lot of servants and — By the way, old Wade has — what do you think he has done?"

"How long has she been living down there?" demanded the other, impatiently. His eyes were gleaming.

"Well, old Wade has gone and got married," went on Simmy, deliberately ignoring the eager question.

"Married a girl of twenty or something like that. Chucked his job, bloomed out as a dandy,— spats and chamois gloves and silk hats,— cleared out three weeks ago for a honeymoon,— rather pretty girl, by the way,—"

Braden's attention had been caught at last and held. "Wade married? Good Lord! Oh, I say, Simmy, you *can't* expect me to believe —"

"You'll see. He has shaken the dust of Thorpe house from his person and is gallivanting around in lavender perfumes and purple linen."

"My God! That old hulk and — twenty years, did you say? Why, the damned old scoundrel! After all he has seen and —" His jaws closed suddenly with a snap, and his eyes narrowed into ugly slits.

"Be careful, Brady, old top," said Simmy, shaking his head. "It won't do to call Wade names, you know. Just stop and think for a second or two."

Thorpe relaxed with a gesture of despair. "You are right, Simmy. Why should I blame Wade?"

He got up and began pacing the floor, his hands clenched behind his back. Simmy smoked in silence, apparently absorbed in watching the angry clouds that blackened the western sky.

Presently Thorpe resumed his seat in the window. His eyes did not meet Simmy's as the latter turned toward him. He look straight out over the tops of the great apartment houses on the far side of the Park.

"How long has she been living down there alone?" he asked again.

"Five or six weeks."

"When did you last see her?"

"Yesterday. She's been dreadfully nervous ever since the blowing up of the *Lusitania*. I asked her to go to the pier with me. She refused. See here, Brady,"

said Simmy, rising suddenly and laying his hand on the other's shoulder, "what are you going to do about Anne?"

"Nothing. Anne can never be anything to me, nor I to her," said Thorpe, white-faced and stern. His face was rigid.

"Nonsense! You love her, don't you?"

"Yes. That has nothing to do with it, however."

"And she loves you. I suppose that hasn't anything to do with it, either. I suppose it is right and proper and natural that you both should go on loving each other to the end of time without realising the joys of —"

"Don't try to argue the —"

"It's right that you should let that glorious, perfect young creature wither and droop with time, grow old without — oh, Lordy, what a damn fool you are, Brady! There isn't the slightest reason in this world why you shouldn't get married and —"

"Stop that, Simmy!"

"Here you are, two absolutely sound, strong, enduring specimens of humanity,— male and female,— loving each other, wanting each other,— and yet you say you can never be anything to each other! Hasn't nature anything to do with it? Are you going to sit there and tell me that for some obstinate, mawkish reason you think you ought to deprive her of the one man in all this world that she wants and must have? It doesn't matter what she did a couple of years ago. It doesn't matter that she was,— and still may be designing,— the fact remains that she is the woman you love and that you are her man. She married old Mr. Thorpe deliberately, I grant you. She doesn't deny it. She loved you when she did it. And you can't, to save your soul, hate her for it. You ought to do so, I admit. *But* you don't, and that solves the problem. You want

her now even more than you did two years ago. You can't defy nature, old chap. You may defy convention, and honour, and even common decency, but you can't beat nature out of its due. Now, look me in the eye! Why can't you marry Anne and — be everything to her, instead of nothing, as you put it? Answer me!"

"It is impossible," groaned Thorpe. "You cannot understand, Simmy."

"Nothing is impossible," said Simmy, the optimist. "If you are afraid of what people will say about it, then all I have to say is that you are worse than a coward: you are a stupid ass. People talked themselves black in the face when she married your grandfather, and what good did it do them? Not a particle of good. They roasted her to a fare-you-well, and they called her a mean, avaricious, soulless woman, and still she survives. Everybody expects her to marry you. When she does it, everybody will smile and say 'I told you so,'— and sneer a little, perhaps,— but, hang it all, what difference should that make? This is a big world. It is busier than you think. It will barely take the time to sniff twice or maybe three times at you and Anne and then it will hustle along on the scent of something new. It's always smelling out things, but that's all it amounts to. It overlooks divorces, liaisons, murders,— everything, in fact, except disappointments. It never forgives the man or woman who disappoints it. Now, I know something else that's on your mind. You think that because you operated — fatally, we'll say,— on your grandfather, that that is an obstacle in the way of your marriage with Anne. Tommy-rot! I've heard of a hundred doctors who have married the widows of their patients, and their friends usually congratulate 'em, which goes to prove something, doesn't it? You are *expected by ninety* per cent. of the inhabitants of

greater New York to marry Anne Tresslyn. They may have forgotten everything else, but that one thing they *do* expect. They said it would happen and it must. They said it when Anne married your grandfather, they said it when he died and they say it now, even though their minds are filled with other things."

Thorpe eyed him steadily throughout this earnest appeal. "Do you think that Anne expects it, Simmy?" he inquired, a harsh note in his voice.

Simmy had to think quickly. "I think she does," he replied, and always was to wonder whether he said the right thing. "She is in love with you. She wants you, and anything that Anne wants she expects to get. I don't mean that in a disparaging sense, either. If she doesn't marry you, she'll never marry any one. She'll wait for you till the end of her days. Even if you were to marry some one else, she'd —"

"I shall not marry any one else," said Thorpe, almost fiercely.

"— She'd go on waiting and wanting you just the same, and you would go on wanting her," concluded Simmy. "You will never consider your life complete until you have Anne Tresslyn as a part of it. She wants to make you happy. That's what most women want when they're in love with a man."

"I tell you, Simmy, I cannot marry Anne. I love her,— God knows how terribly I want her,— in spite of everything. It *is* nature. You can't kill love, no matter how hard you try. Some one else has to do the killing. Anne is keeping it alive in me. She has tortured my love, beaten it, outraged it, but all the time she has been secretly feeding it, caressing it, never for an instant letting it out of her grasp. You cannot understand, Simmy. You've never been in love with a woman *like* Anne. She may have despaired at times, but she

has never given up the fight, not even when she must have thought that I despised her. She knew that my love was mortally hurt, but do you think she would let it die? No! She will keep it alive forever,— and she will suffer, too, in doing so. But what's that to Anne? She —"

"Just a second, old chap," broke in Simmy. "You are forgetting that Anne wants you to be happy."

"God, how happy I could have been with her!"

"See here, will you go down there and see her?" demanded Simmy.

"I can't do that,— I can't do it. Simmy —" he lowered his voice to almost a whisper,—"I can't trust myself. I don't know what would happen if I were to see her again,— be near her, alone with her. This longing for her has become almost unbearable. I thought of her every minute of the time I was out there at the front — Yes, I had to put the heaviest restraint upon myself at times to keep from chucking the whole thing and dashing back here to get her, to take her, to keep her,— maybe to kill her, I don't know. Now I realise that I was wrong in coming back to America at all. I should have gone — oh, anywhere else in the world. But here I am, and, strangely enough, I feel stronger, more able to resist. It was the distance between us that made it so terrible. I can resist her here, but, by heaven, I couldn't over there. I could have come all the way back from France to see her, but I can't go from here down to Washington Square,— so that shows you how I stand in the matter."

"Now I know the real reason why you came back to little old New York," said Simmy sagely, and Thorpe was not offended.

"In the first place I cannot marry her while she still has in her possession the money for which she sold herself and me," said Thorpe, musing aloud. "You ought

to at least be able to understand that, Simmy? No matter how much I love her, I can't make her my wife with that accursed money standing — But there's no use talking about *that*. There is an even graver reason why I ought not to marry her, an insurmountable reason. I cannot tell you what it is, but I fear that down in your heart you suspect."

Simmy leaned forward in his chair. "I think I know, old man," he said simply. "But even that shouldn't stand in the way. I don't see why you should have been kind and gentle and merciful to Mr. Thorpe, and refuse to be the same, in a different way, to her." His face broke into a whimsical smile. "Anne is what you might call hopelessly afflicted. Dammit all, put her out of her misery!"

Thorpe stared at him aghast. The utter banality of the remark left him speechless. For the first time in their acquaintance, he misjudged Simmy Dodge. He drew back from him, scowling.

"That's a pretty rotten thing to say, Simmy," he said, after a moment. "Pretty poor sort of wit."

"It wasn't meant for wit, my friend," said Simmy seriously. "I meant every word of it, no matter how rotten it may have sounded. If you are going to preach mercy and all that sort of silly rot, practise it whenever it is possible. There's no law against your being kind to Anne Tresslyn. You don't have to be governed by a commission or anything like that. She's just as deserving as any one, you know."

"Which is another way of saying that she *deserves* my love?" cried Thorpe angrily.

"She's got it, so it really doesn't matter whether she deserves it or not. You can't take it away from her. You've tried it and — well, she's still got it, so there's no use arguing."

"Do you think it gives me any happiness to love her as I do?" cried the other. "Do you think I am finding joy in the prospect of never having her for my own — all for my own? Do you —"

"Well, my boy, do you think she is finding much happiness living down there in that old house all alone? Do you think she is getting much real joy out of her little old two millions? By the way, why is she living down there at all? I can tell you. She's doing it because she's got nerve enough to play the game out as she began it. She's doing it because she believes it will cause you to think better of her. This is a guess on my part, but I know darned well she wouldn't be doing it if there wasn't some good and sufficient reason."

Thorpe nodded his head slowly, an ironic smile on his lips. "Yes, she *is* playing the game, but not as she began it. I am not so sure that I think better of her for doing it."

"Brady, I hope you'll forgive me for saying something harsh and disrespectful about your grandfather, but here goes. He played you a shabby trick in taking Anne away from you in the first place. No matter how shabbily Anne behaved toward you, he was worse than she. Then he virtually compelled you to perform an operation that — well, I'll not say it. We can forgive him for that. He was suffering. And then he went out of his way to leave that old house down there to Anne, knowing full well that if she continued to live in it, it would be a sort of prison to her. She can't sell it, she can't rent it. She's got to live in it, or abandon it altogether. I call it a pretty mean sort of trick to play on her, if you'll forgive my —"

"She doesn't have to live in it," said Thorpe doggedly.

"She is going to live there until you take her out of

it, bodily if you please, and you are going to become so all-fired sorry for her that you'll —"

"Good Lord, Simmy," shouted Thorpe, springing to his feet with a bitter imprecation, "don't go on like this. I can't stand it. I know how she hates it. I know how frightened, how miserable she is down there. It *is* a prison,— no, worse than that, it is haunted by something that you cannot possibly — My God, it must be awful for her, all alone,— shivering, listening,— something crawly — something sinister and accusing — Why, she —"

"Here, here, old fellow!" cried Simmy in alarm. "Don't go off your nut. You're talking like a crazy man,— and, hang it all, I don't like the look in your eye. Gosh, if it gives you the creeps — who don't have to be down there of nights,— what must it be for that shrinking, sensitive — Hey! Where are you going?"

"I'm going down there to see her. I'm going to tell her that I was a cur to write what I did to her the day I sailed. I —" He stopped short near the door, and faced his friend. His hands were clenched.

"I shall see her just this once,— never again if I can avoid it," he said. "Just to tell her that I don't want her to live in that house. She's got to get out. I'll not know a moment's peace until she is out of that house."

Simmy heard the door slam and a few minutes later the opening and closing of the elevator cage. He sat quite still, looking out over the trees. He was a rather pathetic figure.

"I wonder if I'd be so loyal to him if I had a chance myself," he mused. "Oh, Lordy, Lordy!" He closed his eyes as if in pain.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE storm burst in all its fury when Thorpe was half way down the Avenue in the taxi he had picked up at the Plaza. Pedestrians scurried in all directions, seeking shelter from the wind and rain; the blackness of night had fallen upon the city; the mighty roar of a thousand cannon came out of the clouds; terrifying flashes rent the skies. The man in the taxi neither saw nor heard the savage assault of the elements. He was accustomed to the roar of battle. He was used to thinking with something worse than thunder in his ears, and something worse than raindrops beating about him.

He knew that Anne was afraid of the thunder and the lightning. More than once she had huddled close to him and trembled in the haven of his arms, her fingers to her ears, while storms raged about them. He was thinking of her now, down there in that grim old house, trembling in some darkened place, her eyes wide with alarm, her heart beating wildly with terror,— ah, he remembered so well how wildly her heart could beat!

He had forgotten his words to Simmy: "I can't trust myself!" There was but one object in his mind and that was to retract the unnecessary challenge with which he had closed his letter to her in January. Why should he have demanded of her a sacrifice for which he could offer no consolation? He now admitted to himself that when he wrote the blighting postscript he was inspired by a mean desire to provoke anticipation on her part. "If you also are not a coward, you will return to my grandfather's house, where you belong." What

right had he to revive the hope that she accounted dead? She still had her own life to live, and in her own way. He was not to be a part of it. He was sure of that, and yet he had given her something on which to sustain the belief that a time would come when their lives might find a common channel and run along together to the end. She had taken his words as he had hoped she would, and now he was filled with shame and compunction.

The rain was coming down in sheets when the taxi-cab slid up to the curb in front of the house that had been his home for thirty years. His home! Not hers, but *his!* She did not belong there, and he did. He would never cease to regard this fine old house as his home.

He was forced to wait for the deluge to cease or to slacken. For many minutes he sat there in the cab, his gaze fixed rigidly on the streaming, almost opaque window, trying to penetrate the veil of water that hung between him and the walls of the house not twenty feet away. At last his impatience got the better of him, and, the downpour having diminished slightly, he made a sudden swift dash from the vehicle and up the stone steps into the shelter of the doorway. Here he found company. Four workmen, evidently through for the day, were flattened against the walls of the vestibule.

They made way for him. Without realising what he did, he hastily snatched his key-ring from his pocket, found the familiar key he had used for so many years, and inserted it in the lock. The door opened at once and he entered the hall. As he closed the door behind him, his eyes met the curious gaze of the four workmen, and for the first time he realised what he had done through force of habit. For a moment or two he stood petrified, trying to grasp the full significance of his act.

He had never rung the door-bell of that house,— not in all the years of his life. He had always entered in just this way. His grandfather had given him a key when he was thirteen,— the same key that he now held in his fingers and at which he stared in a sort of stupefaction.

He was suddenly aware of another presence in the hall,— a figure in white that stood near the foot of the staircase, motionless where it had been arrested by the unexpected opening of the door,— a tall, slender figure.

He saw her hand go swiftly to her heart.

"Why — why didn't you — let me know?" she murmured in a voice so low that he could hardly hear the words. "Why do you come in this way to —"

"What must you think of me for — for breaking in upon you —" he began, jerkily. "I don't know what possessed me to — you see, I still have the key I used while I lived — Oh, I'm sorry, Anne! I can't explain. It just seemed natural to —"

"Why did you come without letting me know?" she cried, and now her voice was shrill from the effort she made to suppress her agitation.

"I should have telephoned," he muttered. Suddenly he tore the key from the ring. "Here! It does not belong to me. I should not have the key to your —"

"Keep it," she said, drawing back. "I want you to keep it. I shall be happier if I know that you have the key to the place where I live. No! I will not take it."

To her infinite surprise, he slipped the key into his pocket. She had expected him to throw it upon the floor as she resolutely placed her hands behind her back.

"Very well," he said, rather roughly. "It is quite safe with me. I shall never forget myself again as I have to-day."

For the first time since entering the door, he allowed his gaze to sweep the lofty hallway. But for the fact that he knew he had come into the right house, he would have doubted his own senses. There was nothing here to remind him of the sombre, gloomy place that he had known from childhood's earliest days. All of the massive, ugly trappings were gone, and all of the gloom. The walls were bright, the rugs gay, the woodwork cheerfully white. He glanced quickly down the length of the hall and — yes, the suit of mail was gone! He was conscious of a great relief.

Then his eyes fell upon her again. A strange, wistful little smile had appeared while his gaze went roving.

"You see that I am trying not to be a coward," she said.

"What a beast I was to write that thing to you," he cried. "I came down here to tell you that I am sorry. I don't want you to live here, Anne. It is —"

"Ah, but I am here," she said, "and here I shall stay. We have done wonders with the place. You will not recognise it,— not a single corner of it, Braden. It was all very well as the home of a lonely old man who loved it, but it was not quite the place for a lonely young woman who hated it. Come! Let me show you the library. It is finished. I think you will say it is a woman's room now and not a man's. Some of the rooms upstairs are still unfinished. My own room is a joy. Everything is new and —"

"Anne," he broke in, almost harshly, "it will come to nothing, you may as well know the truth now. It will save you a great deal of unhappiness, and it will allow you to look elsewhere for —"

"Come into the library," she interrupted. "I already have had a great deal of unhappiness in that room,

so I fancy it won't be so hard to hear what you have come to say to me if you say it to me there."

He followed her to the library door, and there stopped in amazement, unwilling to credit his eyes. He was looking into the brightest, gayest room he had ever seen. An incredible transformation had taken place. The vast, stately, sober room had become dainty, exquisite, enchanting. Here, instead of oppressive elegance, was the most delicate beauty; here was exemplified at a glance the sweet, soft touch of woman in contrast to the heavy, uncompromising hand of man. Here was sweetness and freshness, and the sparkle of youth, and gone were the grim things of age. Here was light and happiness, and the fragrance of woman.

"In heaven's name, what *have* you done to this room?" he cried. "Am I in my right senses? Can this be my grandfather's house?"

She smiled, and did not answer. She was watching his face with eager, wistful eyes.

"Why, it's — it's unbelievable," he went on, an odd tremor in his voice. "It is wonderful. It is — why, it is beautiful, Anne. I could not have dreamed that such a change,— What has become of everything? What have you done with all the big, clumsy, musty things that —"

"They are in a storage warehouse," said she crisply. "There isn't so much as a carpet-tack left of the old régime. Everything is gone. Every single thing that was here with your grandfather is gone. I alone am left. When I came down here two months ago the place was filled with the things that you remember. I had made up my mind to stay here,— but not with the things that I remembered. The first thing I did was to clean out the house from cellar to garret. I am not

permitted to sell the contents of this house, but there was nothing to prevent me from storing them. Your grandfather overlooked that little point, I fear. In any event, that was the first thing I did. Everything is gone, mind you,— even to the portrait that used to hang over the mantelpiece there,— and it was the only cheerful object in the house. I wish I could show you my boudoir, my bedroom, and the rooms in which Mr. Thorpe lived. You — you would love them."

He was now standing in the middle of the room, staring about him at the handiwork of Aladdin.

"Why, it isn't — it will not be so dreadful, after all," he said slowly. "You have made it all so lovely, so homelike, so much like yourself that — you will not find it so hard to live here as I —"

"I wanted you to like it, Braden. I wanted you to see the place,— to see what I have done to make it bright and cheerful and endurable. No, I sha'n't find it so hard to live here. I was sure that some day you would come to see me here and I wanted you to feel that — that it wasn't as hard for me as you thought it would be. I have been a coward, though. I confess that I could not have lived here with all those things about to — to remind me of — You see, I just *had* to make the place possible. I hope you are not offended with me for what I have done. I have played havoc with sentiment and association, and you may feel that I —"

"Offended? Good heavens, Anne, why should I be offended? You have a right to do what you like here."

"Ah, but I do not forget that it is *your* home, Braden, not mine. It will always be home to you, and I fear it can never be that to me. This is not much in the way of a library now, I confess. Thirty cases of books are safely stored away,— all of those old first editions and

things of that sort. They meant nothing to me. I don't know what a first edition is, and I never could see any sense in those funny things he called missals, nor the incunabula, if that's the way you pronounce it. You may have liked them, Braden. If you care for them, if you would like to have them in your own house, you must let me *lend* them to you. Everybody borrows books, you know. It would be quite an original idea to lend a whole library, wouldn't it? If you —"

"They are better off in the storage warehouse," he interrupted, trying to steel himself against her rather plaintive friendliness.

"Don't you intend to shake hands with me?" she asked suddenly. "I am so glad that you have come home,— come back, I mean,— and —" She advanced with her hand extended.

It was a perilous moment for both of them when she laid her hand in his. The blood in both of them leaped to the thrill of contact. The impulse to clasp her in his arms, to smother her with kisses, to hold her so close that nothing could ever unlock his arms, was so overpowering that his head swam dizzily and for an instant he was deprived of vision. How he ever passed through that crisis in safety was one of the great mysteries of his life. She was his for the taking! She was ready.

Their hands fell apart. A chill swept through the veins of both,— the ice-cold chill of a great reaction. They would go on loving each other, wanting each other, perhaps forever, but a moment like the one just past would never come again. Bliss, joy, complete satisfaction might come, but that instant of longing could never be surpassed.

He was very white. For a long time he could not trust himself to speak. The fight was a hard one, and it

was not yet over. She was a challenge to all that he tried to master. He wondered why there was a smile in her lovely, soft eyes, while in his own there must have been the hardness of steel. And he wondered long afterward how she could have possessed the calmness to say:

"Simmy must have been insane with joy. He has talked of nothing else for days."

But he did not know that in her secret heart she was crying out in ecstasy: "God, how I love him — and *how he loves me!*"

"He is a good old scout," said he lamely, hardly conscious of the words. Then abruptly: "I can't stay, Anne. I came down to tell you that — that I was a dog to say what I did in my note to you. I knew the construction you would put upon the — well, the injunction. It wasn't fair. I led you to believe that if you came down here to live that sometime I would —"

"Just a moment, Braden," she interrupted, steadily. "You are finding it very difficult to say just the right thing to me. Let me help you, please. I fear that I have a more ready tongue than you and certainly I am less agitated. I confess that your note decided me. I confess that I believed my coming here to live would result in — well, forgiveness is as good a word as any at this time. Now you have come to me to say that I have nothing to gain by living in this house, that I have nothing to gain by living in a place which revolts and terrifies me,— not always, but at times. . Well, you may spare yourself the pain of saying all that to me. I shall continue to live here, even though nothing comes of it, as you say. I shall continue to sit here in this rather enchanting place and wait for you to come and share it with me. If you —"

"Good God! That is just what I am trying to tell you that I cannot —"

"I know, I know," she broke in impatiently. "That is just what you are trying to tell me, and this is just what I am trying to tell you. I do not say that you will ever come to me here, Braden. I am only saying to you that I shall wait for you. If you do not come, that is your affair, not mine. I love you. I love you with every bit of selfishness that is in my soul, every bit of goodness that is in my heart, and every bit of badness that is in my blood. I am proud to tell you that I am selfish in this one respect, if no longer in any other. I would give up everything else in the world to have you. That is how selfish I am. I want to be happy and I selfishly want you to be happy — for my sake if not for your own. Do you suppose that I am glorifying myself by living here? Do you suppose that I am justifying myself? If you do, you are very greatly mistaken. I am here because you led me to believe that — that things might be altered if I —" Her lips trembled despite the brave countenance she presented to him. In a second she had quelled the threatened weakness. "I have made this house a paradise. I have made it a place in which you may find happiness if you care to seek for it here. At night I shudder and cringe, because I am the coward you would try to reform. I hide nothing from myself. I am afraid to be alone in this house. But I shall stay — I shall stay."

"Do you think that I could ever find happiness in this house — now?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Do you expect to find happiness anywhere else, Braden?" she asked, a little break in her voice.

"No. I shall never find happiness anywhere else,—

real happiness, I mean. I cannot be happy without you, Anne."

"Nor I without you," she said simply. "I don't see that it makes very much difference *where* we choose to be unhappy, Braden, so I shall take mine here,— where it is likely to be complete."

"But that is just what I don't want you to do," he cried angrily. "I don't want you to stay here. You must leave this place. You have had hell enough. I insist that you —"

"No use arguing," she said, shaking her head. "I can love you here as well as anywhere else, and that is all I care for,— just my love for you."

"God, what a cruel thing love is, after all. If there was no such thing as love, we could —"

"Don't say that!" she cried out sharply. "Love is everything. It conquers everything. It is both good and evil. It makes happiness and it makes misery. Braden,— oh, my dearest! — see what it has made for us? Love! Why, don't you know it is Love that we love? *We love Love.* I would not love you if you were not Love itself. I treated you abominably, but you still love me. You performed an act of mercy for the man you loved, and he loved you. You cursed me in your heart, and I still love you. We cannot escape love, my friend. It rules us,— it rules all of us. The thing that you say stands between us — that act of mercy, dearest,— what effect has it had upon either of us? I would come to you to-morrow, to-day,— this very hour if you asked me to do so, and not in all the years that are left to me would I see the shadow you shrink from."

"The shadow extends back a great deal farther, Anne," he said, closing his eyes as if in pain. "It

began long before my grandfather found the peace which I have yet to find. It began when you sold yourself to him."

She shrank slightly. "But even that did not kill your love for me," she cried out, defensively. "I did not sell my love,— just my soul, if you must have a charge against me. I've got it back, thank God, and it is worth a good deal more to me to-day than it was when Mr. Thorpe bargained for it. Two million dollars!" She spoke ironically, yet with great seriousness. "If he could have bought my love for that amount, his bargain would have been a good one. If I were to discover now that you do not care for me, Braden, and if I could buy your love, which is the most precious thing in the world to me, I would not hesitate a second to pay out every dollar I have in —"

"Stop!" he cried eagerly, drawing a step nearer and fixing her with a look that puzzled and yet thrilled her. "Would you give up everything — everything, mind you,— if I were to ask you to do so?"

"You said something like that a few months ago," she said, after a moment's hesitation. There was a troubled, hunted look in her eyes, as of a creature at bay. "You make it hard for me, Braden. I don't believe I could give up everything. I have found that all this money does not give me happiness. It does provide me with comfort, with independence, with a certain amount of power. It does not bring me the thing I want more than anything else in the world, however. Still I cannot say to you now that I would willingly give it up, Braden. You would not ask it of me, of course. You are too fair and big —"

"But it is exactly what I would ask of you, Anne," *he said earnestly,* "if it came to an issue. You could

not be anything more to me than you are now if you retained a dollar of that money."

She drew a long, deep breath. "Would you take me back, Braden,— would you let me be your wife if I — if I were to give up all that I received from Mr. Thorpe?" She was watching his face closely, ready to seize upon the slightest expression that might direct her course, now or afterwards.

"I — I — Oh, Anne, we must not harass ourselves like this," he groaned. "It is all so hopeless, so useless. It never can be, so what is the use in talking about it?"

She now appeared to be a little more sure of her ground. There was a note of confidence in her voice as she said: "In that event, it can do no harm for me to say that I do not believe I could give it up, Braden."

"You *wouldn't?*"

"If I were to give up all this money, Braden dear, I would prove myself to be the most selfish creature in the world."

"Selfish? Good Lord! It would be the height of self-denial. It —"

"When a woman wants something so much that she will give up everything in the world to get it, I claim that she is selfish to the last degree. She gratifies self, and there is no other way to look at it. And I will admit to you now, Braden, that if there is no other way, I will give up all this money. That may represent to you just how much I think of *self*. But," and she smiled confidently, "I don't intend to impoverish myself if I can help it, and I don't believe you are selfish enough to ask it of me."

"Would you call Lutie selfish?" he demanded. "She gave up everything for George."

"Lutie is impulsive. She did it voluntarily. No one demanded it of her. She was not obliged to give back a penny, you must remember. My case is different. You would demand a sacrifice of me. Lutie did not sell herself in the beginning. She sold George. She bought him back. If George was worth thirty thousand dollars to her, you are worth two millions to me. She gave her *all*, and that would be my *all*. She was willing to pay. Am I? That is the question."

"You would have to give it up, Annè," said he doggedly.

He saw the colour fade from her cheeks, and the lustre from her eyes.

"I am not sure that I could do it, Braden," she said, after a long silence. Then, almost fiercely: "Will you tell me how I should go about getting rid of all this money,— sensibly,— if I were inclined to do so? What could I do with it? Throw it away? Destroy it? Burn —"

"There isn't much use discussing ways and means," he said with finality in his manner. "I'm sorry we brought the subject up. I came here with a very definite object in view, and we — well, you see what we have come to."

"Oh, I — I love you so!" came tremulously from her lips. "I love you so, Braden. I — I don't see how I can go on living without —" She suppressed the wild, passionate words by deliberately clapping her hands, one above the other, over her lips. Red surged to her brow and a look of exquisite shame and humiliation leaped into her eyes.

"Anne, Anne —" he began, but she turned on him furiously.

"Why do you lie to me? Why do you lie to your-

self? You came here to-day because you were mad with the desire to see me, to be near me, to — Oh, you need not deny it! You have been crying out for me ever since the day you last held me in your arms and kissed me,— ages ago! — just as I have been crying out for you. Don't say that you came here merely to tell me that I must not live in this house if it leads me to hope for — recompense. Don't say that, because it is not the real reason, and you know it. You would have remained in Europe if you were through with me, as you would have yourself believe. But you are not through with me. You never will be. If you cannot be fair with yourself, Braden, you should at least be fair with me. You should not have come here to-day. But you could not help it, you could not resist. It will always be like this, and it is not fair, it is not fair. You say we never can be married to each other. What is there left for us, I ask of you,— what will all this lead to? We are not saints. We are not made of stone. We —"

"God in heaven, Anne," he cried, aghast and incredulous. "Do you know what you are saying? Do you think I would drag you down, despoil you —"

"Oh, you would be honest enough to marry me — *then*," she cried out bitterly. "Your sense of honour would attend to all that. You —"

"Stop!" he commanded, standing over her as she shrank back against the wall. "Do you think that I love you so little that I could — Love? Is that the kind of love that you have been extolling to the skies?"

She covered her flaming face with her hands. "Forgive me, forgive me!" she murmured, brokenly. "I am so ashamed of myself."

He was profoundly moved. A great pity for her swept through him. "I shall not come again," he said

hoarsely. "I will be fair. You are right. You see more clearly than I can see. I must not come to you again unless I come to ask you to be my wife. You are right. We would go mad with —"

"Listen to me, Braden," she interrupted in a strangely quiet manner. "I shall never ask you to come to me. If you want me you must ask me to come to you. I will come. But you are to impose no conditions. You must leave me to fight out my own battle. My love is so great, so honest, so strong that it will triumph over everything else. Listen! Let me say this to you before I send you away from me to-day. Love is relentless. It wrecks homes, it sends men to the gallows and women to the madhouse. It makes drunkards, suicides and murderers of noble men and women. It causes men and women to abandon homes, children, honour — and all the things that should be dear to them. It impoverishes, corrupts and — defiles. It makes cowards of brave men and brave men of cowards. The thing we call love has a thousand parts. It has purity, nobility, grandeur, greed, envy, lust — everything. You have heard of good women abandoning good husbands for bad lovers. You have heard of good mothers giving up the children they worship. You have heard of women and men murdering husbands and wives in order to remove obstacles from the path of love. One woman whom we both know recently gave up wealth, position, honour, children,— everything,— to go down into poverty and disgrace with the man she loved. You know who I mean. She did it because she could not help herself. Opposed to the evil that love can do, there is always the beautiful, the sweet, the pure,— and it is that kind of love that rules the world. But the other kind *is* love, just the same, and while it does not

govern the world, it is none the less imperial. What I want to say to you is this: while love may govern the world, the world cannot govern love. You cannot govern this love you have for me, although you may control it. Nor can I destroy the love I have for you. I may not deserve your love, but I have it and you cannot take it away from me. Some other woman may rob me of it, perhaps, but you cannot do it, my friend. I will wait for you to come and get me, Braden. Now, go,— please go,— and do not come here again until —" she smiled faintly.

He lowered his head. "I will not come again, Anne," he said huskily.

She did not follow him to the door.

CHAPTER XXIX

ANNE left town about the middle of June and did not return until late in September. She surprised every one who knew her by going to Nova Scotia, where she took a cottage in one of the quaint old coast towns. Lutie and George and the baby spent the month of August with her. Near the close of their visit, Anne made an announcement that, for one day at least, caused them to doubt, very gravely, whether she was in her right mind. George, very much perturbed, went so far as to declare to Lutie in the seclusion of their bedroom that night, that Anne was certainly dotty. And the queer part of it all was that he couldn't, for the life of him, feel sorry about it!

The next morning they watched her closely, at times furtively, and waited for her to either renounce the decision of the day before or reveal some sign that she had no recollection of having made the astounding statement at all,— in which case they could be certain that she had been a bit flighty and would be in a position to act accordingly. (Get a specialist after her, or something like that.) But Anne very serenely discoursed on the sweetest sleep she had known in years, and declared she was ready for *anything*, even the twelve-mile tramp that George had been trying so hard to get her to take with him. Her eyes were brighter, her cheeks rosier than they had been for months, and, to George's unbounded amazement, she ate a hearty breakfast with them.

"I have written to Simmy," said she, "and James

has posted the letter. The die is cast. Congratulate me!"

"But, hang it all," cried George desperately, "I still believe you are crazy, Anne, so — how can I congratulate you? My Lord, girl —"

He stopped short, for Lutie sprang up from the table and threw her arms around Anne. She kissed her rapturously, all the time gurgling something into her ear that George could not hear, and perhaps would not have understood if he had. Then they both turned toward him, shining-eyed and exultant. An instant later he rushed over and enveloped both of them in his long, strong arms and shouted out that he was crazy too.

Anne's letter to Simmy was a long one, and she closed it with the sentence: "You may expect me not later than the twentieth of September."

. . . . . .

Thorpe grew thin and haggard as the summer wore away; his nerves were in such a state that he seriously considered giving up his work, for the time being, at least. The truth was gradually being forced in upon him that his hand was no longer as certain, no longer as steady as it had been. Only by exercising the greatest effort of the will was he able to perform the delicate work he undertook to do in the hospitals. He was gravely alarmed by the ever-growing conviction that he was never sure of himself. Not that he had lost confidence in his ability, but he was acutely conscious of having lost interest. He was fighting all the time, but it was his own fight and not that of others. Day and night he was fighting something that would not fight back, and yet was relentless; something that was content to sit back in its own power and watch him waste his strength and endurance. Each succeeding hour saw him grow

weaker under the strain. He was fighting the thing that never surrenders, never weakens, never dies. He was struggling against a mighty, world-old Giant, born the day that God's first man was created, and destined to live with all God's men from that time forth: Passion.

Time and again he went far out of his way to pass by the house near Washington Square, admittedly surreptitious in his movements. On hot nights he rode down Fifth Avenue on the top of the stages, and always cast an eye to the right in passing the street in which Anne lived, looking in vain for lights in the windows of the closed house. And an hundred times a day he thought of the key that no longer kept company with others at the end of a chain but lay loose in his trousers' pocket. Times there were when an almost irresistible desire came upon him to go down there late at night and enter the house, risking discovery by the servants who remained in quarters, just for a glimpse of the rooms upstairs she had described,— her own rooms,— the rooms in which she dreamed of him.

He affected the society of George and Lutie, spending a great deal of his leisure with them, scorning himself the while for the perfectly obvious reason that moved him. Automobile jaunts into the country were not infrequent. He took them out to the country inns for dinner, to places along the New Jersey and Long Island shores, to the show grounds at Coney Island. There were times when he could have cursed himself for leading them to believe that he was interested only in their affairs and not in this affair of his own; times when he realised to the full that he was *using* them to satisfy a certain craving. They were close to Anne in every way; they represented her by proxy; they had letters from her written in the far-off town in Canada; she loved

them, she encouraged them, she envied them. And they talked of her,— how they talked of her!

More than all else, George and Lutie personified Love. They represented love triumphant over all. Their constancy had been rewarded, and the odds had been great against it. He was contented and happy when near them, for they gave out love, they radiated it, they lived deep in the heart of it. He craved the company of these serene, unselfish lovers because they were brave and strong and inspiring. He fed hungrily on their happiness, and he honestly tried to pay them for what they gave to him.

He was glad to hear that George was going into a new and responsible position in the fall,— a six thousand dollar a year job in the office of a big manufacturing company. He rejoiced not because George was going ahead so splendidly but because his advancement was a justification of Anne's faith in her seemingly unworthy brother,— and, moreover, there was distinctly something to be said for the influence of love.

When George's family departed for the north, Thorpe was like a lost soul. In the first week of their absence, he found himself more than once on the point of throwing everything aside and rushing off after them. His scruples, his principles, his resolutions were shaken in the mighty grasp of despair. There were to be no more letters, and, worse than all else, she would not be lonely!

. . . . . .

One day late in August Simmy Dodge burst in upon him. He had motored in from Southampton and there was proof that he had not dallied along the way. His haste in exploding in Thorpe's presence was evidence of an unrestrained eagerness to have it over with.

"My God!" he shouted, tugging at his goggles with

nervous hands from which he had forgotten to remove his gloves. "You've got to put a stop to this sort of thing. It can't go on. She must be crazy,— stark, raving crazy. You must not let her do this —"

"What the devil are you talking about?" gasped Thorpe, acutely alarmed by the little man's actions, to say nothing of his words, which under other circumstances might have been at least intelligent.

"Anne! Why, she's — What do you think she's going to do? Or maybe you know already. Maybe you've put her up to this idiotic — Say, what *do* you know about it?" He was glaring at his friend. The goggles rested on the floor in a far corner of the consultation-room.

"In heaven's name, Simmy, cool off! I haven't the remotest idea of what you are talking about. What has happened?"

"Nothing has happened yet. And it mustn't happen at all. You've got to stop her. She has threatened to do it before, and now she comes out flat-footed and says she's going to do it,— absolutely, irrevocably, positively. Is that plain enough for you? Absolutely, irrev —"

"Would you mind telling me what she is going to do?"

Simmy sat down rather abruptly and wiped his moist, dust-blackened brow.

"She's going to give away every damned nickel of that money she got from old Mr. Thorpe,— every damned nickel of it, do you hear? My God! She *is* crazy, Brady. We've got to put her in a sanitarium — or torium — as soon as we can get hold of — Hi! Look out!"

Thorpe had leaped forward and was shaking him

furiously by the shoulders. His eyes were wide and gleaming.

"Say that again! Say it again!" he shouted. "Say it, damn you, Simmy! Can't you see that I want you to say it again —"

"Say — it — again," chattered Simmy. "Let go! How the dickens can I say anything with you mauling me all over the —"

"I'm sorry! I will — try to be sensible — and quiet. Now, go on, old chap,— tell me all there is to tell." He sank into a chair and leaned forward, watching every expression that crossed his friend's face — watching with an intensity that finally got on Simmy's nerves.

"She wrote me,— I got the letter yesterday,— Lordy, what did I do with it? Never mind. I'll look for it later on. I can remember nearly every word, so it doesn't matter. She says she has made up her mind to give all that money to charity. Some darned nonsense about never knowing happiness as long as she has the stuff in her possession. Absolute idiocy! Wants me to handle the matter for her. Lawyer, and all that sort of thing, you see. I know what the game is, and so do you. She'd sooner have you than all that money. By Gosh! I — here's something I never thought of before." He paused and wiped his brow, utter bewilderment in his eyes. "It has just occurred to me that I'd sooner have Anne than all the money I've got. I've said that to myself a thousand times and — But that has nothing to do with the case. Lordy, it gave me a shock for a second or two, though. Seems to knock my argument all to smash. Still there *is* a difference. I didn't *earn* my money. Where was I? Oh, yes,— er — she's got the idea into her head that she can never be anything to you until she gets rid of that money. Relief fund!

Red Cross! Children's Welfare! Tuberculosis camps! All of 'em! Great snakes! Every nickel! Can you beat it? Now, there's just one way to stop this confounded nonsense. You can do it, and you've got to come to the mark."

Thorpe was breathing fast, his eyes were glowing. "But suppose that I fail to regard it as confounded nonsense. Suppose —"

"Will you marry Anne Thorpe if she gives up this money?" demanded Simmy sharply.

"That has nothing to do with Anne's motives," said Thorpe grimly. "She wants to give it up because it is burning her soul, Simmy."

"Rats! You make me sick, talking like that. She is giving it up for your sake and not because her soul is even uncomfortably hot. Now, I want to see you two patch things up, cut out the nonsense, and get married, — but I don't intend to see Anne make a fool of herself if I can help it. That money is Anne's. The house is hers. The — By the way, she says she intends to *keep* the house. But how in God's name is she going to maintain it if she hasn't a dollar in the world? Think the Red Cross will help her when she begins to starve down there —"

"I shall do nothing to stop her, Simmy," said Thorpe firmly. "If she has made up her mind to give all that money to charity, it is her affair, not mine. God knows the Red Cross Society and the Relief Funds need it now more than ever before. I'll tell you what I think of Anne Tresslyn's sacri —"

"Anne Thorpe, if you please."

"She *hates* — do you hear? — *hates* the money that my grandfather gave to her. It hurts her in more ways than you can ever suspect. Her honour, her pride, her

peace of mind — all of them and more. She sold me out, and she hates the price she received. It is something deeper with her than mere —"

"You are wrong," broke in Simmy, suddenly calm. He leaned forward and laid his hand on Thorpe's knee. "She wants you more than anything else in the world. You are worth more to her than all the money ever coined. It is no real sacrifice, the way she feels about it now, but — listen to me! I am not going to stand idly by and see her make herself as poor as Job's turkey unless I know — positively know, do you hear,— that she is not to lose out entirely. You've just got to say one thing or the other, Brady, before it's too late. If she does all this for you, what will you do for her?"

Thorpe got up from his chair and began pacing the office, his lips compressed, his eyes lowered. At last he stopped in front of Simmy.

"If I were you, Simmy, I would tell her at once that — it will be of no avail."

Simmy glowered to the best of his ability. "Have you never asked her to make this sacrifice? Have you never given her a ray of hope on which —"

"Yes,— I will be honest with you,— I asked her if she *could* give it up."

"There you are!" said Simmy triumphantly. "I was pretty sure you had said something —"

"My God, Simmy, I — I don't know what to do," groaned Thorpe, throwing himself into a chair and staring miserably into the eyes of his friend.

"There is just one thing you are not to do," said the other gently. "You are not to let her do this thing unless you are prepared to meet her half-way. If she does her half, you must do yours. I am looking

out for her interests now, old chap, and I mean to see that she gets fair play. You have no right to let her make this sacrifice unless you are ready to do your part."

"Then say to her for me that she must keep the money, every penny of it."

Simmy was staggered. "But she — she doesn't want it," he muttered, lamely. His face brightened. "I say, old boy, why let the measly money stand in the way? Take her and the money too. Don't be so darned finicky about —"

"Come, come, old fellow," protested Thorpe, eyeing him coldly.

"All right," said Simmy resignedly. "I'll say no more along that line. But I'm going to make you give her a square deal. This money is hers. She bargained for it, and it belongs to her. She sha'n't throw it away if I can help it. I came here to ask you to use your influence, to help me and to help her. You say that she is to keep the money. That means — there's no other chance for her?"

"She knows how I feel about it," said Thorpe doggedly.

"I'll tell her just what you've said. But suppose that she insists on going ahead with this idiotic scheme of hers? Suppose she really hates the money and wants to get rid of it, just as she says? Suppose this is no part of a plan to reconcile — Well, you see what I mean. What then? What's to become of her?"

"I don't know," said Thorpe dully. "I don't know."

"She will be practically penniless, Brady. Her mother will not help her. God, how Mrs. Tresslyn will rage when she hears of this! Lordy, Lordy!"

Thorpe leaned back in the chair and covered his eyes

with his hands. For a long time he sat thus, scarcely breathing. Simmy watched him in perplexity.

"It would be awful to see Anne Tresslyn penniless," said the little man finally, a queer break in his voice. "She's a fair fighter, my boy. She doesn't whimper. She made her mistake and she's willing to pay. One couldn't ask more than that of any one. It means a good deal for her to chuck all this money. I don't want her to do it. I'm fond of her, Brady. I, for one, can't bear the thought of her going about in rummy old clothes and — well, that's just what it will come to — unless she marries some one else."

The hands fell from Thorpe's eyes suddenly. "She will not marry any one else," he exclaimed. "What do you mean? What have you heard? Is there —"

"My Lord, you don't expect the poor girl to remain single all the rest of her life just to please you, do you?" roared Simmy, springing to his feet. "You must not forget that she is young and very beautiful and she'll probably be very poor. And God knows there are plenty of us who would like to marry her!" He took a turn or two up and down the room and then stopped before Thorpe, in whose eyes there was a new and desperate anxiety, born of alarm. "She wants me to arrange matters so that she can begin turning over this money soon after she comes down in September. She hasn't touched the principal. If she sticks to her intention, I'll have to do it. Here is her letter. I'll read it to you. George and Lutie know everything, and she is writing to her mother, she says. Not a word about you, however. Now, listen to what she says, and — for God's sake, *do something!*"

CHAPTER XXX

ANNE'S strictest injunction to Simmy Dodge bore upon the anonymity of the contributions to the various specified charities. Huge sums were to be delivered at stated intervals, covering a period of six months. At the end of that period she would have contributed the whole of her fortune to charity and, through its agencies, to humanity. The only obligation demanded in return from any of these organisations was a pledge of secrecy, and from this pledge there was to be no release until such time as the donor herself announced her willingness to make public the nature and extent of her benefactions. It was this desire to avoid publicity that appealed most strongly to Thorpe. As for poor Simmy,— he could not understand it at all.

Grimly, Anne's lover refused to interfere with her plans. He went about his work from that day on, however, with a feverish eagerness and zest, and an exaltation that frequently lifted him to a sort of glory that he could neither define nor deny. There were moments when he slipped far back into the depths, and cursed himself for rejoicing in the sacrifice she was apparently so willing to make. And at such times he found that he had to resist an impulse that was almost overwhelming in its force: the impulse to rush down to her and cry out that the sacrifice was not necessary!

Mrs. Tresslyn came to see him shortly after Anne's return to the city. She was humble. When she was announced, he prepared himself for a bitter scene. But she was not bitter, she was not furious; on the contrary, she was gentler than he had ever known her to be.

"If you do not take her now, Braden," she said in the course of their brief interview, "I do not know what will become of her. I blame myself for everything, of course. It was I who allowed her to go into that unhappy business of getting Mr. Thorpe's money, and I *am* to blame. I should have allowed her to marry you in the beginning. I should not have been deceived by the cleverness of your amiable grandfather. But, you see I counted on something better than this for her. I thought,— and she thought as well,— that she could one day have both you and the money. It is a pretty hard thing to say, isn't it? I saw her to-day. She is quite happy,— really it seems to me she was radiantly happy this morning. Simmy has arranged for the first instalment of five hundred thousand dollars to be paid over to-morrow. She herself has selected the securities that are to make up this initial payment. They are the best of the lot, Simmy tells me. In a few months she will be penniless. I don't know what is to become of her, Braden, if you do not take her when all this absurd business is over. You love her and she loves you. Both of you should hate me, but Anne, for one, does not. She is sorrier for me than she is for herself. Of course, you are to understand one thing, Braden." She lifted her chin proudly. "She may return to me at any time. My home is hers. She shall never want for anything that I am able to give her. She is my daughter and — well, you are to understand that I shall stand by her, no matter what she does. I have but one object in coming to see you to-day. I need not put it into words."

A few days later Simmy came in, drooping. "Well, the first half-million is gone. Next month another five *hundred* thousand goes. I hope you are happy, Brady."

"I hope Anne is happy," was all that Thorpe said in response.

. . . . . .

No word came to him from Anne. She was as silent as the sphinx. Not a day passed that did not find him running eagerly,— hopefully,— through his mail, looking for the letter he hoped for and was sure that eventually she would write to him. But no letter came. The only news he had of her was obtained through Simmy, who kept him acquainted with the progress of his client's affairs, forgetting quite simply the admonition concerning secrecy.

Thorpe virtually abandoned his visits to the home of the young Tresslyns. He had them out to dinner and the theatre occasionally. They talked quite freely with him about the all-important topic, and seemed not to be unhappy or unduly exercised over the step Anne had taken. In fact, George was bursting with pride in his sister. Apparently he had no other thought than that everything would turn out right and fair for her in the end. But the covert, anxious, analysing look in Lutie's eyes was always present and it was disconcerting.

He avoided the little flat in which he had spent so many happy, and in a sense profitable hours, and they appreciated his reason for doing so. They kept their own counsel. He had no means of knowing that Anne Thorpe's visits were but little more frequent than his.

Anne's silence, her persistent aloofness, began to irritate him at last. Weeks had passed since her return to the city and she had given no sign. He had long since ceased his sly pilgrimages to the neighbourhood of Washington Square. Now as the days grew shorter and the nights infinitely longer, he was conscious, first, of a distinct feeling of resentment toward

her, and later on of an acute sense of uneasiness. The long, dreary hours of darkness fed him with reflections that kept him awake most of the night, and only his iron will held his hand and nerves steady during the days between the black seasons. The theatre palled on him, books failed to hold his attention, people annoyed him. He could not concentrate his thoughts on study; his mind was forever journeying. What was she doing? Every minute of the day he was asking that question of himself. It was in the printed pages of the books he read; it was on the lips of every lecturer he listened to; it was placarded on every inch of scenery in the theatre,— always: "Where is she to-night? What is she doing?"

And then, at last, one cold, rainy night in late November he resumed his stealthy journeys to lower Fifth Avenue atop of the stage, protected by a thick ulster and hidden as well as he could be in the shelter of a rigidly grasped umbrella. Alighting in front of the Brevoort, he slunk rather than sauntered up the Avenue until he came to the cross-town street in which she lived,— in which he once had lived. It was a fair night for such an adventure as this. There were but few people abroad. The rain was falling steadily and there was a gusty wind. He had left his club at ten o'clock, and all the way down the Avenue he was alone on the upper deck of the stage. Afterwards he chuckled guiltily to himself as he recalled the odd stare with which the conductor favoured him when he jestingly inquired if there was "any room aloft."

Walking down the street toward Sixth Avenue, he peered out from beneath the umbrella as he passed his grandfather's house across the way. There were lights downstairs. A solitary taxi-cab stood in front of the

house. He quickened his pace. He did not want to charge himself with spying. A feeling of shame and mortification came over him as he hurried along; his face burned. He was not acting like a man, but as a love-sick, jealous school-boy would have behaved. And yet all the way up Sixth Avenue to Fifty-ninth Street,— he walked the entire distance,— he wondered why he had not waited to see who came forth from Anne's house to enter the taxi-cab.

For a week he stubbornly resisted the desire to repeat the trip downtown. In the meantime, Simmy had developed into a most unsatisfactory informant. He suddenly revealed an astonishing streak of uncommunicativeness, totally unnatural in him and tantalising in the extreme. He rarely mentioned Anne's name and never discussed her movements. Thorpe was obliged to content himself with an occasional word from Lutie, — who was also painfully reticent,— and now and then a scrap of news in the society columns of the newspapers. Once he saw her in the theatre. She was with other people, all of whom he knew. One of them was Percy Wintermill. He began on that night to hate Wintermill. The scion of the Wintermill family sat next to Anne and there was nothing in his manner to indicate that he had resigned himself to defeat in the lists.

If Anne saw him she did not betray the fact. He waited outside for a fairer glimpse of her as she left the theatre. What he saw at close range from his carefully chosen position was not calculated to relieve his mind. She appeared to be quite happy. There was nothing in her appearance or in her manner to indicate that she suffered,— and he *wanted* her to suffer as he was suffering. That night he did not close his eyes.

He had said to her that he would never marry her even though she gave up the money she had received from his grandfather, and she had said — how well he remembered! — that if George was worth thirty thousand dollars to Lutie, which was her *all*,— he was worth two millions to her, and her *all*. She was paying for him now, just as Lutie had paid for George, only in Lutie's case there was the assurance that the sacrifice would bring its own consolation and reward. Anne was going ahead blindly, trusting to an uncertainty. She had his word for it that the sacrifice would bring no reward through him, and yet she persisted in the vain enterprise. She had likened herself, in a sense, to Lutie, and now he was beginning to think of himself as he had once thought of George Tresslyn!

He recalled his pitying scorn for the big, once useless boy during that long period of dog-like watchfulness over the comings and goings of the girl he loved. He had felt sorry for him and yet pleased with him. There was something admirable in the stubborn, drunken loyalty of George Tresslyn,— a loyalty that never wavered even though there was no such thing as hope ahead of him.

As time went on, Thorpe, the sound, sober, indomitable Thorpe,— began to encourage himself with the thought that he too might sink to the extremities through which George had passed,— and be as simple and as firm in his weakness as the other had been! He too might stand in dark places and watch, he too might slink behind like a thing in the night. Only in his case the conditions would be reversed. He would be fighting conviction and not hope, for he knew he had but to walk into Anne's presence and speak,— and the suspense would be over. She was waiting for him.

It was he who would have to surrender, not she.

He fought desperately with himself; the longing to see her, to be near her, to test his vaunted self-control, never for an instant subsided. He fought the harder because he was always asking himself why he fought at all. Why should he not take what belonged to him? Why should he deny himself happiness when it was so much to be desired and so easy to obtain?

But always when he was nearest to the breaking point, and the rush of feeling was at flood, there crept up beside him the shadow that threatened his very existence and hers. He had taken the life of her husband. He had no right to her. Down in his heart he knew that there was no moral ground for the position he took and from which he could not extricate himself. He had committed no crime. There had been no thought of himself in that solemn hour when he delivered his best friend out of bondage. Anne had no qualms, and he knew her to be a creature of fine feelings. She had always revolted against the unlovely aspects of life, and all this despite the claim she made that love would survive the most unholy of oppressions. What was it then that *he* was afraid of? What was it that made him hold back while love tugged so violently, so persistently at his heart-strings?

At times he had flashes of the thing that created the shadow, and it was then that he grasped, in a way, the true cause of his fears. Back of everything he realised there was the most uncanny of superstitions. He could not throw off the feeling that his grandfather, in his grave, still had his hand lifted against his marriage with Anne Tresslyn; that the grim, loving old man still regarded himself as a safeguard against the connivings of Anne!

His common sense, of course, resisted this singular notion. He had but to recall his grandfather's praise of Anne just before he went to his death. Surely that signified an altered opinion of the girl, and no doubt there was in his heart during those last days of life, a very deep, if puzzled, admiration for her. And yet, despite the conviction that his grandfather, had he been pressed for a definite statement would have declared himself as being no longer opposed to his marriage with Anne, there still remained the fact that he had gone to his grave without a word to show that he regarded his experiment as a failure. And he had gone to his grave in a manner that left no room for doubt that his death was to stand always as an obstacle in the path of the lovers. There were times when Braden Thorpe could have cursed his grandfather for the cruel cunning to which he had resorted in the end.

He could not free himself of the ridiculous, distorted and oft-recurring notion that his grandfather was watching him from beyond the grave, nor were all his scientific convictions sufficient to dispel the fear that men live after death and govern the destinies of those who remain.

But through all of these vain struggles, his love for Anne grew stronger, more overpowering. He was hollow-eyed and gaunt, ravenous with the hunger of love. A spectre of his former self, he watched himself starve with sustenance at hand. Bountiful love lay within his grasp and yet he starved. Full, rich pastures spread out before him wherein he could roam to the end of his days, blissfully gorging himself,— and yet he starved. And Anne, who dwelt in those elysian pastures, was starving too!

Once more he wavered and again he fell. He found

himself at midnight standing at the corner above Anne's home, staring at the darkened unresponsive windows. Three nights passed before he resumed the hateful vigil. This time there were lights. And from that time on, he went almost nightly to the neighbourhood of Washington Square, regardless of weather or inconvenience. Her saw her come and go, night after night, and he saw people enter the house to which he held a key,—always he saw from obscure points of vantage and with the stealth and caution of a malefactor.

He came to realise in course of time that she was not at peace with herself, notwithstanding a certain assumption of spiritedness with which she fared into the world with others. At first he was deceived by appearances, but later on he knew that she was not the happy, interested creature she affected to be when adventuring forth in search of pleasure. He observed that she tripped lightly down the steps on leaving the house, and that she ascended them slowly, wearily, almost reluctantly on her return, far in the night. He invariably waited for the lights to appear in the shaded windows of her room upstairs, and then he would hurry away as if pursued. Once, after roaming the streets for two hours following her return to the house, he wended his way back to the spot from which he had last gazed at her windows. To his surprise the lights were still burning. After that he never left the neighbourhood until he saw that the windows were dark, and more often than otherwise the lights did not go out until two or three o'clock in the morning. The significance of these nightly indications of sleeplessness on her part did not escape him.

Bitterly cold and blustering were some of the nights. He sought warmth and shelter from time to time in the

near-by cafés, always returning to his post when the call became irresistible. It was his practice to go to the cheap and lowly cafés, places where he was not likely to be known despite his long residence in the community. He did not drink. It had, of course, occurred to him that he might find solace in resorting to the cup that cheers, but never for an instant was he tempted to do so. He was too strong for that!

Curiosity led him one night to the restaurant of Josiah Wade. He did not enter, but stood outside peering through the window. It was late at night and old Wade was closing the place. A young woman whom Thorpe took to be his wife was chatting amiably with a stalwart youth near the cash register. He did not fail to observe the furtive, shifty glances that Wade shot out from under his bushy eyebrows in the direction of the couple.

He knew, through Simmy, that the last of Templeton Thorpe's money would soon pass from Anne's hands. A million and a half was gone. The time for the last to go was rapidly approaching. She would soon be poorer than when she entered upon the infamous enterprise. There would still remain to her the house in which she lived. It was not a part of the purchase price. It was outside of the bargain she had made, and the right to sell it was forbidden her. But possesion of it was a liability rather than an asset. He wondered what she would do when it came down to the house in which she lived.

Again and again he apostrophized himself as follows: "My God, what am I coming to? Is this madness? Am I as George Tresslyn was, am I no nobler than he? Or was he noble in spite of himself, and am I noble in the same sense? If I am mad with love, if I am weak

and accursed by consequences, why should not she be weaker than I? She is a woman. I am — or was — a man. Why should I sink to such a state as this and she remain brave and strong and resolute? She keeps away from me, why should I not stay away from her? God knows I have tried to resist this thing that she resists, and what have I come to? A street loafer, a spy, a sneak, a dog without a master. She is doing a big thing, and I am doing the smallest thing that man can do. She loves me and longs for me and — Oh, what damned madness is it that brings me to loving her and longing for her and yet makes of me a thing so much less worthy than she?" And so on by the hour, day and night, he cursed himself with questions.

The end came swiftly, resistlessly. She paused at the bottom of the steps as the automobile slid off into the chill, windy night. For the first time in all his vigil, he noted the absence of the footman who always ran up the steps ahead of her to open the door. She was alone to-night. This had never happened before. Mystified, he saw her slowly ascend the steps and pause before the door. Her body drooped wearily. He waited long for her to press the electric button which had taken the place of the ancient knob that jangled the bell at the far end of the hall. But she remained motionless for what seemed to him an interminable time, and then, to his consternation, she leaned against the door and covered her face with her hands.

A great weight suddenly was lifted from his soul; a vast exaltation drove out everything that had been oppressing him for so long. He was free! He was free of the thing that had been driving him to death. Joy, so overwhelming in its rush that he almost collapsed as

it assailed him, swept aside every vestige of resistance, — and, paradox of paradoxes,— made a man of him! He was a man and he would — But even as his jaw set and his body straightened in its old, dominant strength, she opened the door and passed into the dim hall beyond.

He was half across the street when the door closed behind her, but he did not pause. His hand came from his pocket and in his rigid fingers he held the key to his home — and hers.

At the bottom of the steps he halted. The lights in the drawing-room had been switched on. The purpose that filled him now was so great that he waited long there, grasping the hand rail, striving to temper his new-found strength to the gentleness that was in his heart. The fight was over, and he had won — the man of him had won. She was in that room where the lights were,— waiting for him. The moment was not far off when she would be in his arms. He was suffocating with the thought of the nearness of it all!

He mounted the steps. As he came to the top, the door was opened and Anne stood there in the warm light of the hall,— a slender, swaying figure in something rose-coloured and — and her lips were parted in a wondering, enchanted smile. She held out her arms to him.

THE END

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